

# *The Final Draft*



## *Literary Journal*

*Volume X9*  
*Spring 2001*



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# *The Final Draft*

## **Literary Journal**

**Volume 11 Spring 2001**

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*The Final Draft Literary Journal* is an annual publication.

## **Submissions**

Works of original poetry, short fiction, personal essays, literary criticism, and film criticism may be submitted year round. The deadline for consideration for each annual issue is February 1. All works must be original and unpublished. If possible, all submissions should be in both hard copy (paper) and on a 3.5 disk saved as Rich Text Format or Text Only. However, hard copy only submissions will be considered for publication. Author's name, telephone number, e-mail address, and address should appear on the first page of the submission, along with submission category. Authors should also include a brief biographical sketch for inclusion in Contributors Notes.

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Visit our web site at [www.thefinaldraft.org](http://www.thefinaldraft.org)

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## Editor's Note

With the 2001 issue, **The Final Draft Literary Journal** attempts to embrace a greater vision and a broader possibility. In previous issues, submissions were restricted to Durham Technical Community College students, faculty, and staff. In an effort to better serve our community, and in the spirit of inclusiveness, we decided to open the pages of **The Final Draft** to all who wish to submit material. We encourage both established writers and, perhaps more importantly, emerging writers to submit and share their work. The mission of **The Final Draft** is to publish the best original fiction, essays, and criticism we can find. We are also striving to expand our readership and to expose our readers to the multiplicity of literary styles and perspectives contained in these pages. We task our readers to approach these works with open minds, to explore, as Richard Wright once wrote, "new ways of looking and seeing."

The publication of **The Final Draft** is a collaborative effort. The members of our Advisory Board have been invaluable in supplying encouragement, support, and guidance. Without the generous support of the Durham Technical Community College Foundation, **The Final Draft** would not be possible. I cannot begin to express my gratitude to my editorial staff. Their talent, enthusiasm, and selflessness are both overwhelming and humbling. To all who have contributed to the 2001 issue, we thank you for making our vision a reality.

Finally, the 2001 issue of **The Final Draft Literary Journal** is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Michael S. Reynolds (1937-2000), Professor of English and Associate Dean at North Carolina State University. With his too early passing, we have lost one of North Carolina's most esteemed educators and internationally acclaimed literary scholars. The loss to literary scholarship is incalculable; the loss of his friendship is immeasurable. [T.G.]

## POETRY

Girl With a Suitcase, ALICIA DE JOUX .....	6
How to Make Bruised Chicken, NATHAN ALAN WILLIAMS .....	7
I, AARON ROE.....	8
Walls, OKTOBER RED .....	9
And Dolly Saw It All, DEBBIE PARRISH.....	10
You Appear, NICOLE CASSARA .....	11
Star Light, Star Bright, Queen of the Night, DENISE DUNCAN .....	12
Winter Voices, TERRANCE GOULD .....	14
Verbal Sculpture, NATHAN ALAN WILLIAMS .....	16
Innocent, ANGELA NGUYEN-KARNOWSKI ..	17
Rachel, DENISE DUNCAN.....	18
Carbon Copy, RACHEL SMITH .....	20
The Intersection, DEBBIE PARRISH.....	22
Ambitions, ANGELA NGUYEN-KARNOWSKI .....	23
The Bird Watcher, RANDY WHITLEY .....	24
This Heart That We Share, NAN WILLIAMS.....	25
Wallflower, ANGELA NGUYEN-KARNOWSKI .....	26
All People Have Something to Live For, DANIEL DUNCAN .....	27
A Rhyme for Daddy, NAN WILLIAMS.....	28
I Can't Pretend, ALICIA PROCTOR.....	29
That Which He Called Love, DENISE DUNCAN .....	30
Death of a Friend, ALICIA DE JOUX .....	31
Of Ribbons and Rust, DEBBIE PARRISH .....	32
My Mask, ANGELA NGUYEN-KARNOWSKI .....	33
Inside, RACHEL SMITH .....	34
Innocent, ANGELA NGUYEN-KARNOWSKI ..	35



## POETRY

Wilderness, TERRANCE GOULD .....	36
For the Love of God, CONSUELO HODGES .....	37
A Real Man, JEFFREY A GROSS .....	38
Who Am I, DENETTIA SHAW.....	39
Perfect Angel, RACHEL SMITH.....	40
Man's Job, NATHAN ALAN WILLIAMS.....	42
Tiger, SPARKLE MARIE LUCAS .....	42
Looking Inward,	
ANGELA NGUYEN-KARNOWSKI .....	43
Silently Screaming, BRET WILSON .....	44
Judas at Gethsemane, TERRANCE GOULD.....	45
Sights at the Sea Shore, CONSTANCE FEARS..	46
Choreography, ALICIA DE JOUX .....	47

## SHORT FICTION AND ESSAYS

The Real World, CONSUELO HODGES .....	50
These Hands, STEVE CATES .....	51
The Untitled, AARON ROE.....	52
A Woman Lost,	
ANGELA NGUYEN-KARNOWSKI .....	53
Free At Last, KIM STROTHER.....	57
Light Gray Reflection, ANGELA ANDERSON..	58
Secret Passages, KIM STROTHER.....	62
The Buick That Resides in the Garage of the Mind,	
MARTY MITCHELL.....	77
Mailboxes, Flyers, and Ladies Who Lunch,	
MARTY MITCHELL.....	79
Mad Roman, TOM BRADY.....	82
The Passing of Grandpa Jack,	
MARY MARSHA CALLENDER CUPITT ..	95

## CRITICISM

Crane's Use of Irony in <i>Maggie</i> , JARED PACE	109
Eros Vs. Thanatos, BRENT WINTER .....	115

# Girl With A Suitcase

ALICIA DE JOUX

Girl with a suitcase

rain on the  
taxi window  
sad like your face

washes  
    people under  
    winter trees  
    umbrellas  
    and shop windows  
into droplets.

The neon rides  
on threads of rain  
    down your hair  
    your face  
    your wet hems

    the cry-stained  
pages in your hand  
of city streets.

Girl with a suitcase

wounded seal,  
swirled by tides  
of wet raincoats  
going home  
escape is the start  
    of freedom.



# How To Make Bruised Chicken

NATHAN ALAN WILLIAMS

## Contents:

- 1 live chicken (The younger the better. The older it is the tougher it gets)
- 1 cup of sugar (Note: May need more sugar for younger chickens)
- 1 meat tenderizer (mallet, fist, bat, umbrella, even a shoe will do)

- Step 1: Preheat oven to the "Warm" setting. Place chicken in the oven until it seems comfortable.
- Step 2: Take chicken out of the oven and place it in the freezer until you can hear it struggle.
- Step 3: Take chicken out of the freezer and immediately pound with the nearest meat tenderizer.
- Step 4: After the chicken is thoroughly tenderized, sprinkle with sugar and place in the oven once again.
- Step 5: Repeat the "Warm, Chill, Tenderize, and Sweeten" steps until chicken gets tough enough to run away.
- Step 6: Imitate rooster in order to deceive and capture another chicken.

# I

## AARON ROE

We are always at war,  
At war with the facets of living which threaten  
Threaten to descend us into the depths of things not of  
    this world  
Within this state we bear the crux of our struggle  
A battle with the habits that drive us  
Such as fear  
And its friends  
Sometimes its foes  
For egoism assumes we might have a privilege  
A privilege that precludes the desires or wants of  
    others in an attempt to achieve our ends  
To manipulate  
The outcome

We are always at peace  
At peace with all those things we have been told make  
    us special  
We individuals search  
For a peace  
Inside of Us  
Within that fractural collective psyche we assume  
Is me  
Or I  
But it is not about the I, nor the me  
For to destroy myself is to deny all those who have  
    made me  
To deny all those things that have produced this me  
This creature We call I.

Often we allow all those who contributed to be me

And hope it allows all the past to dissolve  
To crawl  
away  
To the quiet place in which we hide those things  
This way we cannot have the blame for many things  
Then it becomes  
Not I  
Nor me  
It is all those who harmed me  
But here is the time to accept the me  
The I  
And understand in these times it is who egoism denies.

## **Walls**

### **OKTOBER RED**

Four men gathered  
to wait  
Four men sat  
to talk.

How could they be so blind  
not to see  
the walls that were  
built around me?

# **And Dolly Saw It All**

**DEBBIE PARRISH**

A little girl's dolly  
Sat alone in the dirt,  
That little doll's mommy  
Had got herself hurt.

They had been playing  
With teacups and toys  
'Til mommy hooked up  
With a rough pack of boys.

The boys they were playing  
Who's 'king of the hill,'  
And mommy, she won,  
Then took quite a spill.

The new king was standing  
So proud and so tall,  
Until he noticed  
Who he had made fall.

The tears ran so freely  
Past her brave toothless grin,  
The king left his castle,  
His heart she did win.

With freckles and glasses  
And bright carrot hair,  
And mommy so dirty,  
They looked such a pair.

Dolly watched as he  
Proudly offered his hand,  
And dusted mommy's dress  
As he helped her to stand.

And mommy said, 'Thank you'  
In a voice soft and sweet,  
For mommy had been clearly  
Swept off her feet.

And dolly, forgotten,  
Still sat in the dirt,  
But she knew that her mommy  
Had forgot being hurt.

## **You Appear**

**NICOLE CASSARA**

You appear on a white horse, all heroic and loving.  
You take me by surprise with your gentleness and  
kindness.

You were the one who rescued me from the dark side.  
You brought me back to the light with a glance.  
You stole my heart with a kiss.  
You stole my soul forever.  
You took my love with expectances.  
You are my god and I am your angel.

# **Star Light, Star Bright, Queen Of The Night**

**DENISE DUNCAN**

Her night was beckoning her  
Out from her crystal castle  
The wakening wind wafted round  
Dancing daringly against her gown  
She was drawn to the darkening sky  
For it called her its queen.

Those shimmering glints like fairies  
Frolicking with her moon  
In the midst of the midnight marvel  
She joined in the rapturous revelry  
Deep in delight with her nascent night  
Secure in her bastion of bliss.

She did not notice one weakness  
Barely breaching, a trifling fault  
Shifting slightly, suddenly slipping  
Ravaging her heavenly night  
Rhapsody of bright bursting stars  
Piercing and slivering her moon.

Spent star dust drifting dreamily  
She held out her hands to catch one  
Delicately dropping like leaves  
Down around her gossamer gown  
Burning as they blew through her  
Wounding and leaving her breathless.

\*\*\*

She stood in the stillness, queen of the night  
For days or years, no one knows  
Time lost its measure, no meaning to treasure  
For all that she loved was lost-  
But one glimmer of hope she held  
So fine and feathery light,  
She still had one piece of her night.

With only one wish to wield  
She spoke softly in almost a whisper,  
    Star that was light  
    Star that was bright  
    I have one wish for you tonight-  
She closed her eyes and blew  
She had done all she could do.

Hope danced from her hand to her heart  
As a faint flicker sparked  
Like fireflies they glowed  
Slowly lights swirled, rising  
Ascending into the dense darkness  
In wonder she watched the rapture.

Her magnificent moon was mended  
And the sparkling stars filled her skies  
She beckoned her beautiful night,  
Good-night.



# Winter Voices

## TERRANCE GOULD

Right up front let me say out loud  
That i love the summer; the road-side flowers,  
Hazy distances, improvident pleasure under  
The maples at noon. Sunflowers, sumac, the  
Swagger and thump of the ramshackling storm.

Evening falls. Thunder fades.  
Roses revel in their sovereignty;  
Catbird, bullfinch, continue their squabbles  
Crying out from the juniper and woodbine:

Swifts, by the hundreds, leave their homes  
In the brickwork to fret over berries  
In the schoolyards at dusk.

I dreamt once that i was a bird. Hunted,  
Found, kicked under the lilac, looking up  
At the stars while the cats circled round  
Enamored of me.  
We all look up at the stars sometime.  
But in the summer they're different, blotchy,  
Vague, no threat to anyone even themselves;  
In winter though, when i venture out, cut  
My fingers to the bone so close and finely  
Chiseled are the stars.

Come, stand with me in winter drifts gone black  
With flung gravel and soot, see for yourself,  
Nothing grows on these humps and swells.  
I could imagine i suppose; pin-pricks  
of color, snapdragon, trout lily, four o'clocks.

Only i see nothing but feathery traces  
Where the seraphim fell: if they could talk  
I would listen, could they hear i would tell them but...  
Let them find their own right way.  
Let them wonder as i have wondered,  
Why winter cuts them, epiphanies  
That no one comprehends.

As for me, wracked and shelled with endless sobs  
Winter voices come, earthly  
Colors manifest to punish and malign.  
Anymore of that and winter would be  
More than i could bear. Yet here in my room  
With my humidifier on i consider  
These months of adversity as time well spent:  
Hope is what we are, whatever we cling to  
despite ourselves, untainted by the sacrament  
And scripture of regret. Dear sweet christ

Rescue me, save me from this nothingness  
I revel in. Unlatch the gates of paradise  
If only briefly and in vain.

# Verbal Sculpture

NATHAN ALAN WILLIAMS

This sculpture is of bronze, though vivid colors are visible through the use of various lacquers. The base is a bronze oval. The edge of which is contoured mimicking an antique tabletop.

At one end of the base a man stands. His hair is short. The tight waves in his hair are obvious even from a distance. He is well groomed. Not a strand of his eyebrows is out of place. His chiseled features are present due to a fresh shave. His clothes are expensive. He is wearing a shirt with a distinctive marking on the pocket, a flag similar to a horizontal letter H in red, blue and white. His pants are baggy with extra pockets on the sides of the knees. Recognizable is a symbol of a tree in winter. His shoes are much less simple. They are a web of fabrics with a prominent check on each side.

He is holding his right hand out. In his hand are various jewel-covered items: watches, rings, necklaces. Below the mound of jewelry, a car key is dangling between his bronze fingers.

At the other end of the oval a lady is in mid-stride, walking toward the man. What she is wearing does not matter as much as his attire, only that it is not to revealing. Her eyes are locked on his, but her body is in the middle of a direction change. She is taking a sudden step to her right to avoid bumping into a third person.

He is standing on the edge of the oval between the couple. He is in the same position as the other man. He is wearing a white shirt that is unbuttoned . His shoes, pants and everything below his chest is unrecognizable due to the blood, the blood from the gaping hole in his chest. He is attempting a smile through the grimace of pain. But what he has chosen as an offering is a still-beating heart.

## **Innocent**

**ANGELA NGUYEN-KARNOWSKI**

When she smiles, I see myself  
Not now, but the way I used to be  
Boisterous and curious,  
Laughs full of silly invincibleness  
Smiling, smiling, and smiling some more,  
Giddy with fascination  
At the way the sand scatters  
In the warm, salty water  
As it is poured into the frosted bucket  
Infectious laughter,  
Spreading like an incurable disease  
Smiling, smiling, and smiling again  
I see myself once more  
Like a young girl  
Underneath a warm summer moon.

# **Rachel**

## **DENISE DUNCAN**

I've been watching and listening...  
When your knees hit the ground  
The scrapes on your hands  
Your tearful wail  
Your frustration  
Spasms catch your breath  
I saw you get up and try again.

I've been watching and listening...  
When your heart hit the ground  
The scrapes on your soul  
Your silent screams  
Your confusion  
You, holding your breath  
I saw you pull yourself together and try again.

I've been watching and listening...  
When your childhood hit the ground  
The scrapes getting deeper  
Your sharp retort  
Your pain  
You, catching your breath  
I saw you turn around and try again.

I've been watching and listening...  
I was there when you hit the ground  
I saw the scrapes that troubled you  
I heard your agony and grieved for you  
I saw you looking for answers  
I heard your wavering breath grow steady  
I saw myself in you trying again.

I've been watching and listening...  
Choosing not to hit the ground  
The scrapes made you wiser  
Your serene sigh  
Your determination and patience  
You breathe gently  
I saw you rewarded for trying again.

I'll always be watching and listening  
To hear the ground lightly under your feet  
To see the scrapes mend wholly  
To hear your triumphant laughter  
To see your delightful beauty  
To hear your inspiring breath  
To see you always trying again.

# **Carbon Copy**

**RACHEL SMITH**

Can you IMAGINE if it were POSSIBLE to  
sit down and have a  
Conversation with yourself . . .

All alone, but not alone

A fantasy, but real

Your mind, but not thinking

A trusted friend, but a stranger

Understanding, but confused

Conscious, but delusional

Face to face, but impossible to look at

Ultimate truth, but all of it lies

A legacy, but unrecognized

Totally familiar, but disoriented

A conversation with your CHARACTER, the same  
soul as your own . . .

Would you LIE

Would you UNDERSTAND

Would you LEARN

Would there be PEACE

Would you HATE

Would there be UNION

Would you TRUST

Would there be COMFORT

Would you FEAR

Would you be WILLING

To see your OWN EYES STARING BACK into  
yours . . .

It's your PAST

It's your SECURITY

It's your SECRETS

It's your HOPES



It's your CONFIDENCE  
It's your DREAMS  
It's your BELIEFS  
It's your INSTABILITY  
It's your SANITY  
It's your WONDERS  
Looking at YOURSELF from OUTSIDE of your  
BODY, CONSCIOUSNESS, and SOUL...  
To be REJECTED by yourself  
To be LOVED by yourself  
To be UNDERSTOOD by yourself  
To be UNRESTRAINED by yourself  
To be FEARED by yourself  
To be HIDDEN by yourself  
To be SADDENED by yourself  
To be UNACCEPTED by yourself  
To see the DEPTHS of your MIND'S ACTIONS from  
the OUTSIDE...  
It would make you AFRAID  
It would make you AWARE  
It would make you CONFUSED  
It would make you DISCONTENT  
It would make you SEE  
It would make you ARGUE  
It would make you MESMERIZED  
It would make you GIVE IN  
It would make you VULNERABLE  
It would make you HELPLESS  
It would make you CHANGE  
WHAT IF you realized the MAGNIFICENT, IRRE-  
PLACEABLE WORK OF ART that you had AL-  
WAYS carried inside you, but YOU had just NEVER  
KNOWN IT was there.

# **The Intersection**

**DEBBIE PARRISH**

What did he do that was so bad?  
What brought him to this place?  
Does it truly break his mother's heart?  
Do tears run down her face?

From far away, yet much too close,  
I saw the tilt of his head.  
I took a deep breath and tried not to cry  
For the child that he had once been.

The look in his eye didn't ask why,  
His own choices had brought him this far,  
But he looked so alone, so scared, so small,  
In the back of that deputy's car.

Time stood so still and I couldn't breathe,  
I pleaded 'light quickly turn green!'  
Then tears filled my eyes and spilled down my cheeks  
As I thought just what this would mean.

A green light would take me on with my life,  
But he'd turn and ride through that gate.  
I wanted to touch him and tell him I cared,  
I wanted to yell, 'hold it, please wait!'

The light finally changed, I went on with my life,  
But his image had burned in my brain.  
My heart still goes out to somebody's boy  
And a mother who harbors her pain.

## Ambitions

ANGELA NGUYEN-KARNOWSKI

Swirling in discontentment  
Overwhelmed by a drama I cannot live out.  
I am silenced by the opinions of the world  
And bound by their every word.  
Allowing them to measure my self worth,  
Paralyzed by awful thoughts.  
I am no good, no good at all  
That is what they tell me,  
And I believe them...  
I believe every word.

Drowning in possibilities  
I cannot see the road ahead  
Where will it lead nor where it will end up.  
Why can't I do whatever it is,  
Whatever it is that brings me joy?  
Instead I pursue what they say I can do,  
And I smile trying to please them,  
Anything to make them happy.  
Crying to myself, alone and cold,  
I wish I could strengthen  
the small voice inside,  
The one that says  
This is who I am  
And  
This is what I want.

# **The Bird Watcher**

**RANDY WHITLEY**

I tried breaking the window,  
But they have prison bars upon them.  
I tried waking you by knocking on the door,  
But the doors are made of steel,  
                    and they only made my hands bleed.  
I need you.  
I'm a bird watcher—keep me company.  
The winter gets cold.  
I heed before just taking you,  
                    because your dad has you in a cage.  
I listen to you sing before your cage is covered  
                    time for you to sleep.  
You are a dove, who I see at night.  
You are not alarmed that I'm not the only watcher.  
You're more than a bird to me  
You're my day that stays far away  
Burns my eyes when I look at you.  
I remember seeing you in the trees,  
But the sun was set on you  
So hurt as a flesh wound  
So I cut down that tree in hopes I'd catch you  
But you flew away  
But not without a silent kiss  
I wait until the day you are free.

# **This Heart That We Share**

**NAN WILLIAMS**

I've often wished I could be cut into two,  
Then I could be me and I could be you.  
And if I could ever be split into two,  
I'd end up being just me and just you.

The thoughts that I have, come right from your head,  
The things that you share, I've often said.  
The feelings I've felt, you've felt them before,  
But where you have entered, I've slammed the door.

The hearts we shared as young girls in the past,  
Have learned quite a lot in the years gone by fast.  
Now I've become me and you've become you,  
But our hearts, we've found, are not split in two.

We've made it this far with our hearts intertwined,  
You've had yours broken as I have had mine,  
But two broken hearts, can learn more than one,  
And only for this I'm glad for what's done.

And still it would seem, to those that would look,  
We both are well read from the very same book.  
Hold on to your heart with love and with care,  
'Cause your heart and mine are one that we share.

Now as for the future, this heart that we share,  
Must forever be handled with love and with care.  
Take nothing less that you'd want for me,  
And I'll do the same to set us both free.

## Wallflower

ANGELA NGUYEN-KARNOWSKI

They wait patiently  
For his attention  
As he makes his rounds.  
Carefully staggered among the grounds,  
Waiting for a word, a breath, a glance  
From the beautiful man in the distance.  
“If only he looked at me”  
They think in unconscious unison  
*“He would recognize my worth.”*  
Will I be the lucky one?  
That he claims today...  
If even only for a day?  
The handsome charmer  
Dances his jig here and there  
Aware of their painful anticipation.  
How long may I dance this dance?  
With them, how long?  
I can and will  
Make my choice in haste  
He selects the lucky recipient  
For his affection and delight  
And she smiles, for this is her night.

# **All People Have Something To Live For**

**DANIEL DUNCAN**

I stare in despair as a moonless night descends  
The mournful cry of an owl rings sharp and clear  
A small hand touches me lightly on my cheek  
I turn and look into two small round eyes, and then a  
    smile appears  
A single tear makes its way, becoming a small river  
I look into the eyes, and then my feelings are more  
    pleasant  
A pair of comforting arms wrap around me gently  
I saw the future, not just the past and present  
    I am needed, and my decisions will affect others  
I have people to live for,  
My kid, his mother  
I realize my life and decisions were not just about my  
    problems and me, but a little more  
As tears of joy drip down my face  
I stare at my child, as he finds warmth in my embrace  
I notice my happiness, and realize that people should  
    have someone to live for too  
I now know we have our reasons, and I hope you do  
    too.



# A Rhyme For Daddy

NAN WILLIAMS

What must I do to earn your love?  
What awful things with you above?  
What can I do to make you see  
How crucial your love is to me?

Behind closed doors, in the dark,  
In the daylight, at the park,  
How come no one ever knew  
All the things you made me do?

Why did you do these things to me?  
Didn't you care what I'd grow up to be?  
If given the chance, would you do it all again?  
May eyes closed tight, your love I pretend.

You taught me that all men must be  
Never trusted or close to me.  
I gave my body, I gave my heart,  
It didn't matter, they'd all still part.

And you, I tried with all my might,  
I let you use me day and night.  
I tried to please you like the rest,  
And just like them, you took, then left.

Well, guess what, Daddy, now I know,  
When to love, and when to go.  
I'm worth real love, I'm sure I'll find it,  
My eyes are open, nevermore blinded.

I guess your love was never near,  
Though through it all I thought you cared.  
But in the end, I clearly see,  
You never wanted love from me.

## **I Can't Pretend**

**ALICIA PROCTOR**

I can't pretend it don't hurt and people shouldn't  
Pretend they understand  
Was a self-respecting woman who gave into  
an ungrateful man.

Was his fool once, but never no more.  
Got to keep my feet  
On the floor. Fight this battle once more.

Came into my life like an angel on a ship,  
carefully releasing  
His spirits, taking journeys and trips.

Looking for an innocent young woman like me.

# **That Which He Called Love**

**DENISE DUNCAN**

The way he cheated and lied  
You'd think she'd realize-  
But a trusting wife and mother,  
She had blinders on her eyes.

Good woman with a broken heart,  
Broken by the facts,  
Tried to understand his sin,  
His foul immoral acts.

Gifted with a second chance  
His false repentance bought,  
Indulged in secret hungers-  
Consumed without a thought.

Confused by such absurdity,  
Suspended in her pain,  
She put her trust in goodness,  
But her trusting was in vain.

No control of passion-  
This emasculated beast,  
Ruined by his weakness,  
A drive that never ceased.

His victims sure and easy,  
Children must comply,  
Disobedience is punished,  
Don't bother asking why.

Mother must know nothing-  
Shield her from the pain.  
Silence! Bear this burden,  
With nothing but disdain.

It all came crashing down one day,  
The old man took the fall.  
Now we know what he called love,  
It wasn't love at all.

## **Death Of A Friend**

**ALICIA DE JOUX**

Death comes  
Choosing someone.

\*

I send flowers.  
Urgently, by phone.

But death  
is swifter.

# **Of Ribbons And Rust**

**DEBBIE PARRISH**

She ran through the field of clover and bees  
And watched her new neighbor as he played on his  
knees.

She slowly inched forward and asked him his name,  
He boldly responded and asked her the same.

He showed her the rust on each of his trucks,  
And how to build roads without any ruts.  
She told him the names of her favorite dolls,  
And promised tomorrow to bring bats and balls.

Her pretty pink ribbon fell from her braid,  
She kicked it aside and the two of them played.  
And two little children found a friend each that day,  
A bond had been formed and promises made.

The years came and went, now in their late teens,  
The days held each other, the night filled with dreams.  
Something was changing in this thing that they shared,  
He wanted to hold her if only he dared.

She walked through the field of the moonlit unknown,  
She heard her name whispered, she wasn't alone.  
He reached out his hand and touched her soft hair,  
Untied the pink ribbon that she had placed there.

Their eyes said it all, what they couldn't say,  
And questions were answered on the night of that day.  
Crossing that line they could never uncross,  
In the grip of desire their innocence was lost.

She whispered she loved him and blinked back the  
tears,  
He held her and told her he'd loved her for years.  
Young lovers laid quiet in their field of stardust,  
Lost in sweet memories of ribbons and rust.

## **My Mask**

**ANGELA NGUYEN-KARNOWSKI**

I am hiding from a reality I cannot face.  
Emptiness and pain, too much tragedy to feel...  
I pretend well, don't I? My smile could hide  
A thousand scars,  
and no one would ever  
Discover the truth...  
but isn't that the point?  
The harsh realism of life?  
The things that make us  
Human and imperfect?

But I will manage quietly.  
Isn't that what I am suppose to do?  
So I will and I won't.  
I will be the perfect pretender...  
Because I can do it  
And no one can tell me that I can't.  
It is a game of tug of war... I do  
What they tell me I cannot, even if  
I don't want to  
Just to prove them wrong.

# **Inside**

## **RACHEL SMITH**

Close my eyes  
Clear my head  
Lay down the mask  
The front is now dead.

Sit down alone  
Search my soul  
The world is gone  
Not playing a role

Acknowledge my feelings  
Defenses at rest  
Analyze my passions  
My thoughts manifest

Enter the world  
Destined to meet  
Take over the soul  
Fate told me to beat

Taken control  
Become its master  
Solved its mystery  
Destroyed its disaster

I go to a place  
Where no one has been  
I made it myself  
I do not know when



I will not get lonely  
Though I go there alone  
In the land I created  
I learn the unknown

Defies all gravity  
And nothing is bad  
Sad makes me happy  
And I cannot get mad

I live there in ecstasy  
To all extremes  
I am my own keeper  
Inside of my dreams.

## **Innocent**

**ANGELA NGUYEN-KARNOWSKI**

When she smiles, I see myself  
Not now, but the way I used to be  
Boisterous and curious,  
Laughs full of silly invincibleness  
Smiling, smiling, and smiling some more,  
Giddy with fascination  
At the way the sand scatters  
In the warm, salty water  
As it is poured into the frosted bucket  
Infectious laughter,  
Spreading like an incurable disease  
Smiling, smiling, and smiling again  
I see myself once more  
Like a young girl  
Underneath a warm summer moon

# Wilderness

## TERRANCE GOULD

Down the cold  
Anonymous rivers of the air into death,  
Will you be saved? I do not know.  
I am incapable of that much faith,  
Too long among the pleasures of the world  
To accommodate longing that can never end.

I want only to accommodate what i think is true;  
The voluptuous uncertainties of faith spring to mind,  
the longevity of stone, irretrievable death,  
Love being lighter than air maybe.  
I am going nowhere, doing nothing,  
Only the movement of my blood gives me away.  
Be good. Be still.

And to the faithful i would tell them  
Listen up; there are no secrets but your own,  
the dead once dead they are dead  
No manner of devotion can lift them.  
I would tell them that i have suffered  
The immaculate ruins of a thousand rain-swept paths  
flinging incidental glances at the dangling vines along  
the way;  
Suffered the winter shrubs, summer woods, the  
fraudulent  
pomp, church and state; found the dead decomposing  
Unable to wonder or to give.

And you might have thought  
That with all those flowers shredding themselves  
In the rain for me,

I could have been more sympathetic,  
But i wasn't;  
Yet of late I am beginning to see,  
whether by accident or design  
the faithful and I are one in the same,  
Inarticulate angels thrown together  
By the hammer-blows of rain in the wilderness;  
Gabbling away at our grief.

## **For The Love Of God**

**CONSUELO HODGES**

If you can imagine a warm mist  
Rising from the waters  
Doves piercing through the air  
Perhaps you can imagine love

If you can imagine a field of sunflowers  
Shining brightly in the sun  
Swaying with every sweet breeze  
Perhaps you can imagine love

If you can imagine the tiny hands  
Of a newborn baby  
Reaching out for its mother  
Perhaps you can imagine love

If you can imagine a father's embrace  
Of a son lost long ago but not forgotten  
Tears flowing like rivers  
Perhaps you can imagine love

# **A Real Man**

**JEFFREY A GROSS**

You deserve the star  
That Twinkles high in the night sky  
Which I can't give you

A person like you  
Needs all that money can buy  
Which I can't give you

Someone who would fly you around the world  
Just to see you smile  
Which I can't do

A person who can match  
Your intelligence  
Which I can't

A person who can sit down  
With you and hold long and deep  
Conversations  
Which I can't do

You need a person who can  
Take you and make you a better person  
Than you already are  
Which I can't

Girl you deserve  
A real man  
Which I am not

# Who Am I

## DENETTIA SHAW

I am the sun shining brightly  
    spreading warm rays of happiness and love  
I am gliding high just like a dove  
    free of all worries and frustrations  
There are no problems or complications  
    that can keep me down  
At least not for long  
I am a jazz singer letting the world hear me  
    sing my song  
Song of freedom  
Song of life  
Song of living without any suffering pain or strife  
Of course we know it would be just a song  
    because in life you have to strive to achieve  
I am the daughter of ancestors  
    who have taught me to believe  
I am a dancer moving gracefully  
    but executing every move to be exact  
I am a teacher making sure that my pupils learn  
    history and heritage, fact by fact  
I am a mother and a role model, teaching my children  
    to use their own mind as a weapon and a tool  
Because in life you can be anything you want to be  
    whether it is an astronaut in air  
    or a marine scientist at sea  
I am the key to the door of opportunity  
    taking all morals and values instilled in me  
    to be the best that I can possibly be  
So who am I—it should be plain to see  
    With my own mind  
    In my own place  
    On my own time  
    I am who I chose to be.

# Perfect Angel

RACHEL SMITH

So there you were  
    inside my dream,  
Most gorgeous thing  
    I'd ever seen.

How could my mind  
    have imagined you?  
Such an image,  
    too good to be true.

I watched from a distance,  
    and then closed my eyes.  
But I could still see you,  
    the sight never dies.

I was dying to touch you,  
    to feel you touch me.  
I wish I could tell you,  
    but this was only a dream.

For hours I slept,  
    and dreamed about you.  
In the dark of the night,  
    my love for you grew.

I want you forever,  
    but you will be gone.  
When I wake from my dream,  
    I will be all alone.

I could have you one night  
and then give you up.  
I could hold you and keep you  
and then have to stop.

I will stay in this dream,  
forever asleep.  
All that I want  
is your love to keep.

Where would you be  
when I awoke?  
It would be no different  
when we spoke.

Because you would not know  
my dreams from last night.  
You'd have no idea  
that you'd captured my sight.

You do not know,  
and you never will,  
the nights spent with you,  
and the ones I do still.

## **Man's Job**

**NATHAN ALAN WILLIAMS**

If she inhales, make sure she smells roses.  
If she tastes anything, make sure it is sweet.  
If she feels someone else's touch, make sure she  
    compares it to yours.  
If she likes music, make sure the beating of your heart  
    is her favorite overture.  
If she likes art, make sure she sees you in every  
    masterpiece.  
And if you can give her the world, your job is to make  
    sure she has no need for it.  
In short, if you aren't the only source of color in her  
    black and white dreams, you are not doing  
    your job.

## **Tiger**

**SPARKLE MARIE LUCAS**

Stalking, fearful eyes,  
    Rock-ribbed teeth,  
Unpolished, gold skin,  
    Terrors nothing.  
Conceit, stands alone,  
Heart, Body, and Soul.  
Master of all animal life,  
    Famished.  
Blood of a Tiger is always genuine.  
    Becoming a myth,  
    Tiger domain.  
Tiger conquers the world.



## Looking Inward

ANGELA NGUYEN-KARNOWSKI

This clear avenue of reflection,  
A view to your heart, your soul  
Does not truly exist.  
Those who believe in this  
Crystalline image of evaluation...  
Well, they lie to themselves.  
In an almost deserted coffeehouse,  
Sitting outside of myself,  
Jazz music faint in the background...  
I am desperate to look in.

I watch the rainfall  
Upon those who seek shelter...  
Myself included.  
Thinking intently,  
But of what I am unsure.  
Stepping into this  
Clear avenue of reflection  
Provides me restricted views...  
I see only the things  
I want to see.

# Silently Screaming

BRET WILSON

I was enjoying the sound of silence  
I think she graduated in '96  
Everyone's either a - - - or an - - - aren't they?  
I don't know how long it's been  
Since I could remember when  
The first thing was the last  
You said you loved me  
I don't know what to represent  
I haven't pledged my allegiance yet  
Right now I'm happy in the middle on my own  
I heard the things you had to say  
They led me down a dead end maze  
And now I think you've lost me for a while  
You flaunt your fashion for all to see  
Do you really think you'll remember me?  
What is crisis and what is melodrama?  
I remember the day at the movie house  
You brought what I don't want to be without  
Then took it away before I got the idea  
At some point we've all felt cheated  
Just wait and see if you don't believe it  
After all it's the price of an education  
Say you care then forget to call  
I know your games  
I've lost them all  
Please show me the way out of here  
While my intentions are still sincere.

# **Judas At Gethsemane**

**TERRANCE GOULD**

I came here today to honor you.  
So bedraggled even the sparrows condescend;  
To remember the moment they took you away,  
An ordinary mortal who became my friend.

From Nazareth to Bethany, Synagogue  
To stable, my accusers have grown bold.  
Rumors find me dangling from every crooked tree  
Some say it was silver, others gold.

Crushed by their duplicity I knew you would  
Forgive them, even as they fled.  
I should have held you tighter when the blows came  
down,  
You fell right through my arms instead.

Some few it seems among the others say  
That somehow they misunderstood;  
Simon peter, that dog, saw them raining down blows  
then fled through Jerusalem tightening his hood.

I came to remember, not to pray, to stand  
Where you and I once stood, and never  
Have I thought of you not falling through my arms:  
Friend, I would have held you forever.

# Sights At The Sea Shore

## CONSTANCE FEARS

Stones and fragmented little pieces of rocks, pebbles and shells are scattered on the sand. The waves rush over them and at first, it appears to overtake them. The water lifts the stones high and carries them against the tide. Out of the deep, deep sea they ride, crashing it seems on rugged, jagged pillars of rock, While rolling across the ocean's debris, whirling about the sea urchins and taking hold of some water-cress and seaweed.

Then, the arm of the wave rises up and curves around and hugs the rocks as if it is cradling them, returning them safely to shore. But somehow, they appear different, as the forgers of the waves lay the stones out along the hot glistening shoulder of the sand. The stones glitter like priceless, precious jewels: the craftsman's best quality wares. The sun rays burst upon them, creating such a dazzling sight . The sheer beauty of the stones attract the viewer like a magnet; An alluring pull draws the passersby to come near and admire the spectacular sight.

Later in the day as the sun goes down in the west, the sky, looking like a mosaic masterpiece, displays majestically, color, mood and hue: Pink, yellow, blue and happy and sad, bright and dark. Walking along the shore, I notice what appears to be nebulous specks. As I draw near to them, I am struck by this myriad of color and design that is unusually formed.

I slowly kneel and clasp in the palm of my hand just a few of these gems in a pile of clay, as I gasp aloud and gleefully marvel at His glorious handiwork.

# Choreography

ALICIA DE JOUX

I was a bird.  
I flew in,  
I was here  
and beside you.

\*

Always arriving.  
Trailing bits of blue  
and hiding from wildness  
of storms  
and people.

\*

Migrating  
further than snow geese,  
loner than one arctic tern.

\*

I  
was looking for you,  
and found myself.

\*

These days when summer  
is becoming different,  
is gold on the waters  
of the lake, still green on trees  
and brilliant in early pumpkins,  
when our hands are cool  
on our bodies at night,  
and days are precise and vivid  
as perfect flowers placed forever  
in paperweight crystal,  
these days I, too, am becoming  
transformed, as changed  
as the length of the sun,  
the division of night and day.

\*

I feel myself in the wind,  
that is completely itself.  
I move, and no-one  
is my reference point.  
Where I begin  
and where I go are unnecessary  
details.  
I bend with leaves,  
may settle, and be still.  
My power is in my ways  
of moving, my range  
of passion, the shapes  
I create as I go,  
the songs of my dancing,  
the silk feel of my floating.

\*

I am wind.  
I can speak to you  
wordlessly.  
You may watch me,  
see  
where I linger,  
know  
when I tumult.  
I can -  
show you  
all my most important  
moves  
and still you will lose  
me.  
If you try  
to change me,  
to lock me in your house,  
I will suffocate.  
There is always one more  
mountain beckoning,  
a different song-sound waiting,  
one more arabesque  
to perform.

That is how you keep us:  
the wind and I.

# **The Real World**

**CONSUELO HODGES**

As shaky feet stepped off of the bus and stood in front of that great brick building that they call higher learning, I felt an uneasy weight fall down on me. Brown, white, red, all in different shades, these were the colors of the faces that stared back at me. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes for a second or two. Then I opened them up again. It was at that moment that I realized that this must be the real world. Every shade of brown was what I grew up with. Usually you saw a pale face once a day when the mail ran, or when someone got lost and stopped long enough to ask for directions. Now I was seeing more than just the black faces with a few white ones here and there. There stood a whole rainbow of people. Each with their own tale of where they came from, who momma knew, and where daddy worked. Back home I was praised for being the first in family to go to college. The name Jimmy James became as well known as country ham and eggs on Sunday morning. They even let me ride in the Christmas parade. But I suddenly felt like a small shrimp in a big shark tank. Every step I took towards the door felt like I was knee deep in wet cement that was quickly getting hard. Sweat poured off my brow in buckets and everything looked hazy. I thought I saw stars for a second. Just when it seemed like my legs were going to give way, I felt this hand reach up and touch me on the shoulder. I turned around to see this Chinese fellow with the biggest grin I ever saw. He offered to show me around the campus. I found out later that his name was Jimmy too. Who would've thought that we'd come to be such good buddies. Boy, if grandpa could see this. He never lived



to see the day when two guys from different sides of the world could come together and there not be a war going on. I laugh when I think about it sometimes. Over the rest of the year, I sent pictures to my kinfolk back home. In them were some of my new friends. Some brown, some white, some red, all in different shades, but all my friends. This is the real world.

## **These Hands**

**STEVE CATES**

These hands have never massaged a heart back to life or molded raw clay into a priceless work of art. These hands have never gently held a scalpel to remove a tumor, or touched a paintbrush to canvas to create a masterpiece. Before you judge the person to whom these hands belong or for what these hands do or do not do, take a moment to consider what these hands have done or might do in the future. These hands have extended themselves out to meet others in countless gestures of friendship. These hands have reached for many young girls' hands to bring a slight blush to their cheeks and a smile to their lips. These hands have held brooms, mops, vacuum cleaners, and the like to keep my parent's hands from working any harder to support me. These hands have supported people's belongings to keep them from harm on their journey to a new home. These hands have picked up and delivered tons of linen to keep the sick warm and clean. These hands have formed many chords on various instruments to bring songs of joy to many lives. These hands have written many essays, poems, and songs. These hands have worked out algebra prob-

lems, balanced ledgers, and moved a computer mouse. Eventually, one of these hands will reach out and grasp its degree certificate. So, before you judge these hands for what you see them do, ponder about what they might achieve. Someday these hands may massage a heart, remove a tumor, paint a masterpiece, or sculpt a sculpture — or maybe even sign your paycheck.

## **The Untitled**

**AARON ROE**

Will those proceeding and including my inception to this reality ever understand the true essence of ‘The Dead’? Or will they think ‘The Working Man’s Band’ is indicative of a societal paradigm? For sometimes we live in no particular way than our own.

I have reached this indignant haughty milestone of existence I call a quarter century, and I realize that I am not different from those that follow after me nor those preceding, but am only differentiated by my perceptions, which are lead by our almost insignificant experiences. Perhaps were I to travel the Silk Road and return with Pasta, or had I split the first atom, I could feel some level of arrogance; however I am caged by my own lack thereof, experience, and bound in an existence of infinite knowledge, which overwhelms me. For those preceding me had no gaping maw of information looming over their very being, begging. . . pleading to be caressed and fondled, just needing with thoughtless abandon to be accessed with a click and a dial. For how can we be uninformed? Perhaps it is that the informed are only a gargantuan group of specialized individuals groping for our cash.

Or as most wish to believe, it is our own slothfulness. I cannot claim to know, or understand, but can only hope it is the prior, that of saturation, of a never attainable mass looming over our heads. At the very least this is the optimistic outlook I wish to take as I watch us get fat.

Civilizations can be measured with a sine. As I watch this generation of mine be gauged and named with a variable, I wonder. Is our society's uncertainty founded purely on its fatalistic nature, or is it our constant need to trace our governmental roots through history? For experience dictates, with prosperity comes obesity, obesity holds the hand of obsequiousness, proceeding this is servility to tyranny, which only leads to a new cycle of struggle. Is this cycle to be lead down with the 'X' or carried to a new level, unheralded by the records of history? Will our variable drag us into the chronicles of Rome or Babylon? Are we the harbingers of our descent into the ocean as Civilizations of antiquity and myth? The only answer to this quandary I can offer, and do not mistake this, is that we wore parachute pants, fat fluorescent laces and pinned our pants.

## **A Woman Lost**

**ANGELA NGUYEN-KARNOWSKI**

Although the apron was a bit small, she nuzzled into it to begin her daily routine. She pulled off her gardening hat and shook out her auburn locks. Everything she needed was there, placed into neat areas on the kitchen counter: cake pan, eggs, flour, sugar to one side, to another sat carrots, green beans, onions, pota-

toes and a package of beef. She was fixing stew for dinner and yellow cake with lemon frosting for dessert. After shoving the dandelions she just collected from the yard into a vase of water and placing them on the table, she stepped back. Yes, she thought, he would be pleased.

She dialed his work number carefully and smiled to herself.

“Hello,” he greeted.

“It’s me.”

“Oh, hey. “

-Silence.

“I was wondering if maybe you could pick up a thing or two from the store on your way home. I ran out of the wine you like so much, and I need some. . .”

“What do we need wine for?”

“I was fixing stew and I thought that it would be nice to share a glass, you know, a little something special.”

“I really do not care if we have it or not, I mean it is only dinner. Hey listen, my other line is ringing, don’t worry about any wine.”

A dead line. A sigh as she replaced the phone to its cradle.

She realized they knew nothing about each other. They used to, but life had changed. Space had grown over like a weed between two souls. Infecting every leaf, intertwining amid its roots, strangling it from its last breath. And the silence...the silence had spread throughout the house, like a slow, painful cancer. These days she spent most of her time thinking how she loved him, and wishing that he still loved her too. Not with the “I have been with you through everything” love, but the “I need to be with you” kind of love. The kind you want to be silly drunk with, the kind you want to drown yourself in.

She mixed the cakes ingredients until they were smooth and creamy and scooped them into the pan. Popping it into the scalding oven, she set the timer for thirty-five. These thoughts usually festered within her during her days of solitude, mostly while he was at work or running errands. But now, she had these thoughts all the time, even sitting in the same room with him, often right next to him.

It wasn't right. Should she even be feeling this way? That there was no point in living in a house with someone who felt nothing. Nothing was even too gentle a word. He was her roommate, nothing more and sometimes less. The beef was browned, and along with the potatoes, went into the pot of broth. It was hard enough being married, but even worse to be living without his love. His love. She used to remember what that was, but now, she was lucky if she could catch a glimpse of it in some far off shadow. He used to keep his eyes glued to every inch of her frame; she couldn't walk out of a room without his eyes following along each step of the way. Now his eyes hardly made any contact with her body or her face. A single tear fell against the back of her hand. Was it the onion? She had diced it so quickly, as if it were second nature to her.

But this was normal, right? This was the average marriage with its ups and downs and curves to and fro. Nothing is perfect and humans aren't either, right? Then why did she feel so pained? She snapped the beans with fierce determination, lost in forgotten moments. She had lived her life, devoted to children and a husband, and that was what it was suppose to be. *Snap.* Yet, she knew that this constant drain was uneasy and far from comforting to her callous heart. *Snap. Snap.* Callous because it had become such. Years of ripping the softness to shreds had left nothing



but the puzzling pieces, the pieces that had become so intolerable of being tolerable of this thing and that thing. *Snap. Snap. Snap.* She had seen many marriages fall into this stage, so it had to be typical, maybe even traditional and ordinary. How could something that was once fun, turn into something that was so methodical and common? Setting the alarm, brushing teeth, answering the phone when it rings, showering in the am...all things done without thought, without emotion or attachment.

Think normal, she whispered almost in a chant. Everyone experiences a dull marriage, yet she could never remember anyone crawling out of this hole of lonely lovelessness. The knife came down hard.

“Oh for goodness sake,” she cried through clenched teeth. The blade hadn’t touched to the bone, but had plunged deep enough to draw blood. Rinsing it off in the sink, the cold water numbed her fingertip, a familiar feeling. Quickly, she doctored the minor, self-inflicted wound with some ointment and a Band-Aid. The carrots remained untainted except for a drop of her blood on one particularly pale carrot. As if never noticing it before, she studied the worn patterns on her hands. Her hands could tell the story of a woman’s unrecognized devotion and consistency. The glamour and youth had faded with time, as is considered normal. Did he consider it normal? Even as she wished he did, she knew that his lack of attention answered the opposite.

And how she thought that they could find those stolen love-filled moments that they had shared once before. She had convinced herself that the moments were caught up in a bottle and were resting somewhere on a shelf; the way you put up storage to be rediscovered at a later time. Now she knew it was farther away than some storage garage. It was like losing costume

jewelry at a remote vacation spot. You worry at first, but then you forget you ever had it to being with and you press on. You get through it, right?

The key turned in the door, and she gasped for breath of contentment. At least for now.

“I’m home.”

“In the kitchen,” she said and prepared herself with synthetic emotion to go through the daily grind.

## **Free At Last**

### **KIM STROTHER**

As I stand on the outside, the first time in seven long years, I take what seems like my first breath. I slowly exhale. I do believe the sun is brighter and warmer on this side of the gate.

It doesn’t matter that I have no where to go and no one to see. I am free and this is all that matters. I walk down the long driveway, and as I reach the end, there is a decision to make. Do I go left or do I go right? I’ve always been partial to “left” since I’m left handed, so that’s the way I’ll go.

No one’s around, so no one’s looking. I decide to run for a short while. I pick up the pace a little. I hear the gravel under my feet. It’s a wonderful sound. I thought I had forgotten how to run. So many times I’d wanted to escape, to take off running and never look back.

I am forced to slow my pace; exhaustion is setting in. The muscles in my legs are hard and stiff. It feels as though my hamstrings will snap in two, but it still feels good.

I stop and lean against a tree. The sound of wa-

ter catches my attention. I have to follow the sound. Just beyond a small thicket of trees stands the most beautiful pond I've ever laid my eyes on. I look around; no one is in sight. I take my clothes off quickly and dive in.

The water is warmed by the sun, and it is the most tranquil experience. I never want to leave. I could become a fish or a duck, and this could be my new home. I laugh aloud at my own hilarity (which I never should have done). My laughter catches the attention of a man who is just coming out of the woods. He must've been hunting because he has a shotgun in hand.

He tells me to get out of his pond. As I do, I can feel his eyes all over my body. I dress at gun point. Then he tells me to follow him to his truck, where he calls the sheriff. I sit on the tailgate of his truck for nearly an hour before the sheriff finally shows.

Just in case I had not figured it out on my own, he makes sure he tells me that I am arrested for trespassing and indecent exposure, a direct violation of my probation. I may have to go back and pull the remainder of my sentence just because I enjoyed nature a little too much for a little too long. That's okay. I had no where to go anyway.

## **Light Gray Reflection**

**ANGELA ANDERSON**

We have been married for four months now. Did you notice? Are you sick of your bride yet? Sometimes, when I look in the mirror and I think



about you smiling at me, it makes me want to throw up. I wish I could talk to you, but I'm afraid.

I guess I shouldn't be surprised. Isn't this what happens when you live a lie? You can't expect truth in exchange for a lie. But it still hurts. Maybe it isn't all a lie. I don't know. Maybe everything is a lie.

You... god, you were beautiful. You were handsome and gentle and understanding and you knew when to laugh and when to be quiet. You were perfect. Did you ever notice that? And when I met you, I was perfect too, a little star in the heavens. But then I noticed who I was, and I guess you must have seen something in yourself I never did, because it seemed both of us weren't perfect after all.

It isn't like it was a surprise. You always loved her. Her, with the smile that says everything is all right. I hate her smile. She looks like she's laughing at me when she reassures me. Of course she doesn't love you. She's too much to love anyone. *She's* the star. I'm the little girl that watches her from the Earth, and hates her, and pretends to be her. You never hold my hand. Do you hate me because I'm not her? You don't say so, but I think you do. You must. I do.

And I lied to you, too. What a horrible lie to tell someone. You were perfect, I never lied about that, but I wasn't in love with you. I always loved him. You knew that, didn't you? Didn't you ever see the way I watched him when I talked to you? Didn't you notice? I'm disgusting for doing that to you. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Why did you ask me to marry you? You *knew* I didn't love you, and I knew you didn't love me. But we smiled, and hugged, and said yes, and for a while things seemed all right. Even when I saw you holding her on our wedding day. It was a goodbye, wasn't it? Her boyfriend didn't seem to think it was okay,

though. And the man I loved didn't think so either. But he didn't love me, and she didn't really love you, so we went on with it and pretended.

It's my own fault. I chased you, even though I didn't love you. Maybe I thought I did for a while. I wanted you to look at me, because you were beautiful. But I didn't love you. The man I loved didn't have that easy smile or that soft kindness or that sense of chivalry. You're really something out of the dark ages, you know that? That's why I wanted you. Beautiful relic of a beautiful time. Not ugly and smoky and used like I am. Like the man I love is.

You could make me happy. You want to. I know you do. It's not your fault. I'm sorry for being like this. I'm sorry for using you. You're really so kind to me. All I do is scream at you and hurt you. You're so patient. I'm sorry.

When did you first realize I didn't love you and you didn't love me? Maybe you never really deluded yourself like that. Maybe you were using me too. If she didn't love you, why not take the next best thing and just try to be happy? But I'm not here just to make you happy. You should love me. What a hypocrite I am. I hate you sometimes. Now I'm chained to you forever, until you decide to throw me away. And when will that be? Soon, I hope. Or never.

I can't give you children. I know you didn't think about it before you asked me, but now I can see that it hurts you. Do you want to try adoption, or something else? But what kind of parents could we be? We don't love each other. Could we love a child?

You're good with kids, after all. Maybe it could work. Maybe a child would draw us together, as we work with the stress and the pain and the joy of it all. But what if we crushed the child instead? It's too much to risk, it's too much to do to a little boy.

Her boyfriend hurt her and you rushed to her defense. Of course you did, you're chivalrous. But why can't you rush to me like that? You come home drunk sometimes. You've never been violent with me, just quiet and sullen, slipping into bed with your clothes on. At those times I think that I should slip away while you're sated, and run, and never come back. And you would chase but never find me, and then you'd be sorry. Then you'd realized you loved me, but I never loved you. I'd have the last laugh, if I could stop crying.

When I did run, once, you came for me a few days later, quiet, unrepentant. And I wanted to defy you. He gave me shelter, he and his wife, even though he knew what I was doing to you. I think he was jealous of you. Maybe he does love me. You never punched him because you thought he was taking advantage of me. You never threatened anyone if they hurt me. I know I don't deserve it, but I want it. It's something that aches inside of me sometimes.

Ten years from now, who will we be? Will you still look at me like that? Will her glances still silence you? Will I run away, will I live with him, and you with her? Maybe I'll live with her boyfriend. He seemed nice.

Or maybe we'll become something we aren't now. Maybe someday I'll look at you, and I won't think about him at all. Maybe I'll stop seeing her reflected in your eyes. Maybe someday I'll hold your hand, and you'll hold mine, and we'll go for walks, just walking, and if I started to turn away you'd notice, you'd ask what was wrong, and I would tell you. Maybe. Someday.

I want to write a letter. I will tell you what I've done, the lies I've told you, and I'll ask you to tell me the truth too. And then we'll both decide what to do

from there, with you in love with her and me in love with him and the two of us hopeless. Maybe you'll take my hand then. Honesty works miracles, doesn't it? Or is that a lie, too? What is true, then?

Maybe lies that are truly believed in become true. I'll believe in that for now, and believe that I love you with all my heart and that you love me with yours. I'm going to hold onto that, and hope, and when you look at her I won't walk away, I'll wait for you to turn back. You'll always turn back to me, because we're together now. I have you trapped.

So forgive me and I'll forgive you, somehow. We'll grow old together a little more quickly if we try to relax. I'd like a girl, if you think that would be all right. A little girl with green eyes like mine and sandy blond hair like yours. You can teach her to play the flute and I'll teach her not to get too attached to Windows 98. She'll be outstanding, the most amazing child that ever lived. We'll take good care of her.

So... just hold my hand for now. Please.

## **Secret Passages**

**KIM STROTHER**

The hope chest sat just under the window which over looked all the fields and ponds that stretched out over the 300 acre estate.

Kayla sat upon the hope chest, cradling her knees to her small bosom, she sat staring out the window not really seeing what was outside. The only sound that could be heard was her occasional sigh.

How she longed to have a hobby or a really good friend but all she really had was her thoughts.

Kayla loved to just sit and let her mind drift off into places unknown.

Maybe in the fall she would be able to make new friends when school started. It appeared there weren't any kids her age near by her new home.

She just sat and stared with a half crooked smile on her face, but then her mom interrupted her train of thought. "Kayla Marie Anderson! Just what do you think you are doing? Quit procrastinating and finish unpacking those boxes." Her mom pointed to the stack of boxes that had all been marked "Kayla's Room." Some of her most prized possessions were over in those boxes, but she had no interest in them.

Being an obedient child, she went on and did as she was told. Even though she thought of herself as much older. Her physical age was 15 but on the inside she was pushing 20.

Kayla had gotten several boxes unpacked by putting all her clothes in her drawers. Now came the hard part, organizing the rest of her belongings into a small closet.

She opened the closet door to study its dimensions and in the back she noticed a latch style door. At first she chose to ignore it and place some things on the shelves above. Slowly and surely her eyes kept wandering down to it. Many questions kept entering her mind. "Why would there be a little door there? Where would it lead? Should I take a look?"

"No!" She said to herself and she went on with the rest of her day. Kayla managed to get all her stuff unpacked and just where she wanted it.

Later that evening, once she went to bed, she allowed her imagination to run wild. Almost scaring herself with her own thoughts, she decided right then and there she would find out in the morning just what was behind that door, if anything.



When breakfast was over the next morning Kayla got her dad's flashlight and went on up to her closet. The door was stuck so she tried various items to pry it open. Finally, it popped open, and dust flew all about. It had been a very long time since anyone had opened it.

When the dust settled, Kayla aimed the flashlight into the little doorway and looked into it. There were hallways that lead into many different directions. "What on earth?" she thought. "Why would there be halls on the inside of the walls?" It didn't take but a minute of contemplation to decide to go in and have a look around. It was the oddest, yet most fascinating place Kayla had ever seen.

Still a little scared, Kayla surveyed the area not knowing which way to go. She decided to take the path with the least amount of cobwebs. She walked passed what she knew was her brothers room. "Why doesn't he have a little door?" she wondered aloud. She could hear the muffled sounds of her 7 year old brother playing just on the other side of the wall. It took total self-restraint not to scare the pants off him by knocking on the walls or making ghost sounds. She decided following the passages was more important to her, but later she may change her mind.

When she came to the end of the hall she decided not to go to the next hallway, but instead travel on 5 more feet into a little dead end. She didn't know quite why, it was almost as if she was lead.

In this darkened little corner she noticed an old dusty rug lying on the floor. She couldn't make out the design so she picked it up and gave it a good shake. Dust consumed the little passage way. Kayla had to hold her breath.

After the dust settled, Kayla laid the rug back in it's place and shined the light on it. It was the pretti-

est rug she had ever seen. It was done in purple and pink, with roses spelling out a girls name, Audrina. "Wow!" she thought. "What would it be doing in here?"

As if told to do so, Kayla sat down on the rug and started to shine her light around to see what someone else would have seen if they had sat on the rug. At first nothing caught her attention, but then she looked above her. In the lower part of the rafters she noticed little cubby holes, so she stood back up to investigate them. There wasn't anything in the first few but then upon looking into the fourth one she found a dirty satin box. It was sort of like a jewelry box, but it was so old.

Kayla blew the dust off of it and sat down to open it. The first tray in it had little trinkets, costume jewelry, hair ribbons, and things of that nature. She lifted the tray out and in the bottom she found a girls diary and what appeared to be some love letters. Kayla decided to take the whole box back to her room so that she wouldn't be missed by any of her family and have them come looking for her. She also wanted to examine her new treasures in better light.

Back in her room, Kayla tried to clean the satin box as best she could, and then she laid it on her desk and plopped on her bed. She was trying to decide if she should really open it again. Diaries were meant to be private. Did she have a right? She decided that she did have a right, because they were left behind and purchased right along with the house, so that made them hers. Deep down she didn't believe that, but curiosity got the best of her; that was the best excuse she could come up with, so it'd have to do.

Kayla went back over to the box and removed the tray. Then she lifted the diary and love letters out of it and carried them over to her hope chest where she

always sat to daydream. Was this the hobby she longed for? Could she find a friend within these dirty pages?

She decided to start with the diary first. It was beautifully written from a young girl about her age, but 50 years ago. Her name had been Audrina. Kayla paused for a moment and wondered if Audrina was still alive and how much would this woman cherish having these items returned to her.

Kayla went on to read the passage in the diary, and before long she was totally drawn in. She felt every emotion that Audrina had laid out in those pages before her.

Poor Audrina had experienced so much at an early age that it made Kayla realize that she really was just a child herself after all.

There were so many similarities between her and this Audrina. First, they were the same age when holding this diary in their hands. They both had long black hair with small features, and they were both hopelessly romantic, searching for someone to connect with.

Their difference's would be, as she read on day after day, that Audrina suffered the hand of a abusive father, and sought refuge in the secret passages. The other difference would be that Audrina had found her first love.

Between the diary and the love letters, Kayla could see why Audrina had fallen for this boy, Anthony. Audrina had confided in Anthony about her father and together they planned to get her away from him. The only trouble was that Audrina's father had found out about them. After beating Audrina, he forbid Anthony to come near his daughter or he'd have him arrested, because Anthony was 18 and Audrina was only 15.



So, they had to meet secretly. They met before and after school at a secret meeting place. It was down by the pond on Audrina's daddy's land, but it was quite a ways away from the house, so hopefully no one would ever spot them.

With each visit Anthony and Audrina would make plans for their great escape. Later one fall night, just before winter had set in, Anthony had a gift for Audrina. It was a beautiful ruby ring.

Audrina expressed how much she loved the ring, but told him she couldn't keep it because she did not want her father to find it. So Anthony decided to hide it under that big old rock by the pond. It took both of them to move it. Every time they met there, they would move the rock together. She would wear the ring while they sat there and talked, dreaming and watching for falling stars.

When the night was over and came time to part, together they'd put the ring under the rock, and Anthony would give her a love letter that he'd written to her while they were apart. Then they'd sneak back into their homes and into their beds like nothing ever happened.

Kayla decided to match the dates on the love letters with the excerpts from the diary and read them together day by day. That way she could experience word for word what each of them was thinking and feeling. Kayla found herself becoming so involved with these characters that it was the only thing she thought of every moment of the day.

As Kayla was nearing the end of the letters and diary she began wondering if there was more hidden in the passages, so she'd make a daily trip into the hollowed halls to search out all the nooks and crannies of the secret passage ways.

To her delight she did find more items. Her

most treasured find was a old photo of Anthony and Audrina. It was simply amazing. Audrina had described them so well that Kayla's imagination was almost identical to the photo.

Some of the other items she found was Anthony's letterman's sweater, a stuffed bear that he had bought her, and the blanket in which they sat on down by the pond, or at least that's what Kayla wanted to pretend it was used for.

What Kayla really wanted to find was the ruby ring, but no luck, but one day as Kayla was showing her grandma around the new estate, she opened up and told her grandma everything about the diary and love letters, and she confessed to reading them.

Kayla's grandma was a true romantic herself and she loved to hear all the details. So Kayla told her everything she had learned thus far, and her grandma was totally hooked just like Kayla. Her grandma told her that for a special summer project, maybe the two of them could go to the library and research the old house and owners. If Kayla wanted to, maybe they could find Audrina and give her back her belongings.

Just then they came upon a pond. "Oh Grandma, I wonder if this is the pond where they met." They walked around the entire length of the pond and on the other side stood a big rock. Both of them just stared at it in awe.

"Grandma please, let's see if we can move it." They did, and just as if Anthony and Audrina had placed it there the night before, there was the ruby ring.

Kayla slid it on her ring finger. It was a perfect fit. "Oh my gosh!" Can you believe it's still here?" Both of them just couldn't believe it, and then Kayla got a sick feeling in her stomach.

"Oh grandma why would have they left the

ring here? Something must have happened. Oh no! I don't think this is going to have a happy ending." Grandma brushed a tear from Kayla's cheek and told her to finish reading the diary and letters, and they'd make plans for their trip to the library.

Kayla's sense of impending doom kept her from reading for a few days. She just knew things weren't going to end the way she had wanted. The same question kept going through her head, "Why would they leave the ring behind?" It took the two of them to move the rock, so it couldn't be moved by just one of them. It had been a ring passed down, so Anthony wouldn't have just left it there if they had broken up. No, it just didn't make any sense.

Kayla decided sitting around wondering about it would drive her crazy. She'd have to finish what she started, so she went back to the diary and prayed that she could find the answers there.

The pages brought many tears to Kayla's eyes. Audrina had described a night that no child should ever suffer.

Dear old dad had caught her one night sneaking back into the house. He grabbed her and drug her down the basement stairs, far away from her mother and brother. They would never hear her screams.

Audrina described what it felt like to be thrown all around the room, toppling over furniture, and once tripping over a chair and landing flat on her face. She had thought he was going to kill her. She begged him to quit. This upset him tremendously.

"Is this what you do? Beg men? Well you don't have to beg me!" What in the world was he talking about? "You think you like older men. We'll just see about that!"

Tears from 50 years ago still stained the pages, but now Kayla was adding new ones. She read on to

find out that Audrina's dad had raped her that night in the basement. He had robbed her of her virginity and of her hopes of ever leaving this place.

There were only a couple pages left in the diary and all the love letters had been read. Audrina's way of writing had changed. There was nothing but sadness. There was only one mention of Anthony. She was scared he'd no longer want her, now that her innocence was stolen.

Audrina had missed their last midnight meeting and several days of school. Her mom would ask her what was wrong but she did the best she could to hide the truth from her.

After the third day of missed school, Anthony must have become too worried about her, because he snuck into the house and up to Audrina's room after everyone had left for work and school.

On one hand Audrina was so happy to see him, but on the other hand she was so ashamed. She had a hard time looking him in the eye. She took him by the hand and lead him to the secret passage ways so that they could talk freely without being caught by her mother.

It only took moments to tell him, but it felt so good to Audrina to let it out. Anthony immediately became outraged. He started blasting off to Audrina about all the things he was going to do to her father. She tried to calm him down. Eventually it worked, but only because she told him that she was ready to run away with him.

Audrina told him that she wanted a chance to say good bye to her mother and brother and that she'd collect the things she wanted to take with her; she would meet him that night at their place by the pond. She watched him leave with a look of hope in his eyes.

Audrina spent her last hours in her room pack-

ing lightly and writing her last entry in her diary. It read:

*To whom ever finds this diary tucked away in the hollowed walls of this horrid house, I do hope you haven't found it seeking refuge from abuse as I did. I wish you well in life for I am about to escape this prison and find life with my true love, but first I shall let all the secrets out of these passageways. Yes, I'm going now to tell my mother about the horrible monster to whom she is married. If there is one word of wisdom I leave to you, it's not to let fear override the truth. The truth will set you free.*

*Audrina*

Kayla wiped away a few tears. She set the diary down on her desk and went across the room to sit on her hope chest and gaze out the window. She directed her view toward the pond and questions started to flood her thoughts again, and still the most important one was "Why did they leave the ring behind?" If things had gone as they had planned that night why didn't they get the ring when the met.

Kayla and her grandma went to the library the next week to see if they could find out Audrina's last name.

They did some research on the past owners of the house to see who had owned it during the time set in the diary. It was harder to trace than they thought.

After their second visit to the library, the librarian told them there was an easier way to find the information they were seeking. Instead of searching the microfiche they could just go down to city hall. They'd have all the information they were after.



It really excited Kayla and her grandma, but it was getting so late in the day that they had to plan the trip to city hall for another day. The only thing was, it'd have to be put off longer than either of them wanted; school was starting in less than a week, and Kayla had to finish helping her mom unpack and go shopping to buy school supplies and clothes.

As soon as school started Kayla was so surprised at her popularity. Never had she been so accepted. She was on top of the world. She even got invited to the first school dance by the cutest guy in school, Tony Robertson.

It wasn't until Kayla and Tony had been going together for a month that she found time for her grandma, and it was the visit to city hall that let them know what Audrina's last name had been. It was Danbury.

Their next step would be to check the local directories for all the Danbury's in the area and hopefully one of these people could lead them to Audrina. Their desire was to return Audrina's belongings to her and, hopefully, find out how the story ended.

Kayla hoped with all her might that Audrina and Anthony were happily married with lots of kids and grandkids. She wanted the story to end with them just hurriedly leaving that day without the ring. Maybe as time passed by they just decided to leave the ring there because they didn't want to trespass.

After calling all the Danbury's in town she was at another dead end. She shared her story with her boyfriend, Tony, and he suggested that she look up the guy, Anthony. That was a great idea so she searched through the diary and letters for his last name. She found nothing. She was at wits end but as she laid in her bed that night she came up with an idea. She needed to search the other items she had found in the

passage ways.

She found it. It was on the back of the old photograph. Anthony's last name was Robertson. "Oh my gosh!" That's the same last name as Tony's. "Anthony, Tony, Tony, Anthony, wow could it be?"

Kayla ran to the phone and called Tony. She had to find out if they were related. Tony answered the phone, and after she went through it all he told her that Anthony Robertson was his grandfather and that he was still alive. They agreed to meet and go over to his grandfather's house.

Kayla called her grandmother next to tell her everything and to ask for a ride. She said she was on her way.

An hour later Kayla, her Grandma, and Tony were walking up the sidewalk carrying all of Audrina's treasures that Kayla had found. She was too nervous to ask Tony if Audrina had been his grandmother. She knew that his grandmother had passed on a few years ago.

Tony's grandfather was so amazed with the whole story. He sat and looked at all the things with a smile on his face. You could see by the look in his eyes, his thoughts were going back in time.

Kayla got up the nerve to ask how the story ended. Her heart sank as she learned how that night, so long ago, unfolded.

Grandpa told her the whole sad story, or at least what he thought had happened. "She agreed to meet me that night after she confronted her mother with the truth, and what I think happened is that her father must have found out and went after her. I went to meet her that night, but when I got close to our spot, I noticed people with flash lights treading the woods and fields. As I got closer, I could hear different people hollering out her name. So I stayed hidden in the

woods. I thought they had found her missing from her room and were searching for her. I stayed low and kept a look out for her. After a while, I figured either she made it back to her house, or else she took off when she saw everyone out looking for her. The search party got too close to me, so I had to leave. I prayed that she'd be all right and find her way to me; but the next day, in the evening newspaper, I had to read along with the rest of the world what had happened to her."

"What did the newspaper say grandpa?" Tony asked.

Grandpa scratched his head and eased back into his old recliner, then he went on to explain. "It told about Audrina missing and the search party; but it had gotten so late and the fog set in real thick, so they called it off until morning but the next morning. When they started the search, her little brother was the one who found her."

Kayla was almost afraid to ask, "Where was she?"

"I'm afraid he found her floating in the pond. She had drowned." Grandpa told her.

Kayla knew something didn't sound right so she asked, "What do you think happened, Mr. Robertson? How do you think she drowned? I just don't understand. She shouldn't have gone into the water. Wasn't it cold that time of year?"

Grandpa looked so sad, almost as if it had happened yesterday but he wanted to answer her questions so he said "Well the rest has always been speculation. The abuse was never reported, that I know of, so what I think happened is that her daddy found her and shut her up the best way he could. I think he went after her that night and got his normal temper going. He was probably afraid her claims of rape would get out so he



followed her up to the pond and in a struggle he decided to kill her. I mean, she could've come running up there to meet me and slipped and fell or something, but I just don't think so."

"Me either," Kayla stated in a weakened voice.

Just like a light had gone on inside of grandpa's head he leaned forward and said "And I tell you something else that made me believe it could be so....."

"What's that grandpa?" Tony asked.

"Well, about 15 or so years later, a little girl down the way claimed he had got hold of her one night and tried to rape her, and this little girl said he kept calling her Audrina."

"Oh my! What happened?" Kayla asked.

Grandpa went on, "Well he never went to jail, but he went to one of those crazy hospitals. The wife, Audrina's mom, was so embarrassed, she packed up and moved out of state. Went to stay with an old aunt or something. The house eventually got auctioned off."

"I just can't believe it ended like that. It was such a beautiful love story." Kayla told him as she hugged the diary close to her heart.

Grandpa got up from his chair, they could hear his bones crack with old age. He walked across the living room to look out his picture window. He pondered a thought before he said, "Yes, it was a beautiful love story. She was my first love. It took a long time for me to accept that she was gone. I often thought about going and getting that ring from under that rock, so that I'd have something of hers, but I have what really counts. I have our memories, and no matter how old I get, I'll never forget her. Plus, I remember the promise we made to each other about leaving it there and only moving the rock together. So I thought it should stay

right where she had put it last.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t have touched it.” Kayla told him.

“No dear that’s okay. I think Audrina would have enjoyed knowing a gal like you took so much time and interest in her. She’d want you to keep these things,” Grandpa said, as he winked at his grandson.

Kayla went to hand him the ring but Tony’s grandpa stopped her, “No, I want you to keep it. You deserve it after all of your investigating.”

“Oh no, I couldn’t. Don’t you want her things?” Kayla exclaimed.

Grandpa thought a moment and then said, “Well, I would like to have the picture, and maybe my grandson would want to wear my old letterman’s sweater.”

“Sure grandpa, I’d love to.” Tony said excitedly.

Grandpa concluded, “Well kids I’m sure glad you came to me with all this. It sure was nice walking down memory lane. I hope I have answered all your questions.”

Kayla spoke with all the compassion she could muster, “Sir, I’d like to thank you for sharing your story with us. I am so sorry it ended so tragically.”

Grandpa tried to end their conversation with some food for thought, “I’ve always been told everything happens for a reason, but still ain’t figured it out. I guess I never will.”

Kayla left that house that day wiser, but she too figured she’d never understand why it had to happen the way it did or why she was the one who had to find it all. What exactly was it that she was suppose to do with this knowledge?

Kayla would never forget Audrina and she would always keep the ring close to her heart.

That night as Kayla went to bed she thanked God for life and all the mysteries that came with it.

## **The Buick That Resides In The Garage Of The Mind**

**MARTY MITCHELL**

The thick aroma of yellow Dial soap and Old Spice cologne wafted through the hallway of my parents' 1960s ranch-style home. I remembered that this scent meant that Daddy was fully dressed and ready to leave. The television silenced, and I could hear his footsteps head down the hallway toward the garage. For a moment, I expected to hear my mother's footsteps scurrying quickly behind him, but the house fell silent. I squeezed into my black Sunday pumps, threw a black shawl over my shoulder, and headed for the garage. I hoped that I could hold myself together through Mom's service. Daddy had certainly fared well over the last few days. I had drawn comfort from his strength.

As I hurried down the hallway to the back door, I could see Daddy already perched behind the wheel of Mom's Buick. I stepped out, shut the door, and tiptoed in those uncomfortably fashionable pumps to the passenger's door. I lifted the shiny chrome handle and slid into the cloth seats. I was ever so thankful that Dad had vetoed the limousine. "Why in the world would we need a limousine service?" he had said. "I am a perfectly sound man with a perfectly sound automobile." Daddy was right. He had proved over the years that in many ways, a good man and a reliable automobile share many of the same qualities. As the

car eased out of the driveway and onto the highway, I stared beyond the window into dreamy thought.

I felt very safe and protected when I was with my Dad. He grew up on a rural farm and employed a strong work ethic. After high school, he married Mom and had the presence of mind to find work in a large telephone company where advancement for a young man in the 1960s was imminent. Sure enough, with intelligence and hard work, he landed an engineering position and steered reliably through a 35-year career. On the weekends he would pull on his work boots and a flannel shirt, mow the grass, and check the oil in our Buick. Dad was a good, strong, ideal American father.

I was slightly jolted as we came to a stoplight on 5<sup>th</sup> street. The church was only a few miles away now. Oh, how I longed to be a child again able to curl up in the backseat of our Buick, enveloped by the soft cloth seats as if they were Daddy's arms. Like Daddy, that old Buick had transported us safely through many adventures. The ordinary blue exterior of the car typified the blue-collar family that rode within its paradoxical boundaries. We went to the beach, the mountains, and to church—all symbolic of a middle-America family. I sometimes fantasized on long trips that my ordinary Dad and our anonymous vehicle would undergo a transformation that would propel my father into a svelte, modern man and that our car was a shiny Mercedes whisking us through the city. The tires of our Buick crunched across the gravel of the church parking lot, and I looked at my father. His right hand securely held the 12 o'clock position on the steering wheel. His left elbow rested on the door, and his left fingers nonchalantly gripped the 8 o'clock position. He was dressed today in a suit and tie and shiny shoes. He looked out of place. The flannel shirt and happy times of yesterday had always blended magically with

the fabric of this old Buick. On this day, the cold wool suit against the backdrop of the car's warm cloth stood out like a stone carving. I got out of the car and shut the door. That anonymous old Buick sat stoically today in the parking lot, awaiting instruction and direction. I understood that today my father, much like the old Buick, would need guidance and direction. I walked over, took him by the arm, and we walked inside.

I think back about that day, the Buick, and my Dad. Many changes have taken place, and some things remain the same. He continues to drive that old Buick, but is not as imprisoned by its ideology. Dad will now drive to a museum, park the unassuming Buick, and direct his mind toward a completely new thought. The Buick, however, still reliably beckons the good man to its wheel. My Dad and that Buick remain a perfect amalgam of basic principles and popular American thought. The only profound difference is that the American man, my father, lives and breathes and steers his own destiny. The Buick, however, remains motionless in the garage of his mind.

## **Mailboxes, Flyers, And Ladies Who Lunch**

**MARTY MITCHELL**

I opened the metal mailbox and peered inside. Shoved carelessly to the rear was the requisite pile of Mitchell family mail, consisting of coupon flyers, envelopes with clear windows, and the all too pricey magazine subscriptions. Cursed mailman. Doesn't he realize how expensive these subscriptions are? Why, if I were mailman, I would neatly arrange each patrons



mail according to size and issue of importance. The large W magazine would rest on the bottom. Its heavy gloss pages filled with narcissistic gossip should be ample support for the piggybacked National Geographics and USA Todays. I would then categorize those horrid business-type envelopes into first-class and bulk-rates, slice a Have You Seen Me? flyer square down the middle, and top off with a note of engraved pastel finery that only flirts with the select few. Viola! A perfect orchestration of an otherwise menial task. As I re-hinged the lid, a sigh gathered in the back of my throat. I thought, "Is this monotony what Marty Mitchell's life has become?" The answers would soon reveal themselves.

I had always planned on going back to school. At certain points in my life I had even mustered the nerve to mail transcript request forms to and fro. Somehow, I was ever more comfortable buying a half-million dollar home or sliding into my image affirming Gucci loafers, than picking up a Gap backpack. However, on June 6, 2000, the mail revealed itself to me in a whole new way. A bright yellow Durham Tech flyer was placed precariously on top of the days' mail. You know, looking back I cannot tell you what made this flyer stand out. Over the years, I had received many school flyers and chunked them into the wastebasket with a sense of foreboding angst. But this day was different. This mere Tech school flyer was like the hundred year oak, perched atop a mountain of gossip column grasses and charge card ravines. I quickly taped the flyer to my kitchen door, as I had often done with important notes, and promised myself that I would make this call.

The summer of 2000 paraded along. With each open of the kitchen door, that bright Durham Tech flyer clapped in the breeze like a third grade teacher.

Each day I made a mental note to call The Durham Tech office and get all the gory details about scheduling, classes, and the dreaded placement test. And each day I became more and more anxious. Sigmund Freud himself may have been impressed with my artful anxiety driven cover-ups and questions to the brain. What about my family? Who will walk the dog? Pay the cleaning lady? Water plants? Get the mail? Do I have to use #2 pencils and just what happened to #1 and #3? And God only knows, what about going to *lunch*? Just how will my friends let me know about important Neiman Marcus sales? Would they? I walked into the den and pressed the gray button on my shiny new laptop and sat rigidly on the edge of the leather chair. The 100-year-old leather beckoned for my relaxation, but my eyes were already fixed on the Durham Tech web site. Ironically, the home page was a mirror image of the flyer that had found its way onto my kitchen door. I drew the telephone to my ear, dialed the number, and decided that questions of the brain should be punctuated with periods.

Normally, August in North Carolina should be absolutely obliterated. Why, the thick humidity and bloodthirsty mosquitoes alone usually drive me into wishful thoughts of February – August’s evil fraternal twin. Yet a new breath of post summer excitement pushed through my lungs on August 21, 2000. It was the first day of classes, and the first day of the rest of my life. Will I feel the affirmation that I have been looking for? Will I be able to redirect my past years focuses on other peoples’ destiny to that of my own? Will I be able to mold my talents and gifts into a career? These questions mattered not as I leaned hard on the silver push bar and threw my shoulder into the thrust of the school door? What an absolutely excellent August day.

Looking over the last few months I can clearly see that I have completed one of America's great tasks. A task that until now, I believed to be a privilege reserved for those of youthful gestation and ordered plan. I step eagerly into my new academic world. With placement tests over and schedules made, I rest comfortably with thoughts more now than the burning questions of yesterday. The girl-going-to-lunch Gucci bag has found its way to a protected shelf in the cedar closet and a Gap backpack now holds its place warm on my arm.

## **Mad Roman**

**TOM BRADY**

As soon as Teddy recognized the figure shuffling sideways down the street, he mumbled a swear word under his breath. Then he could hear his mother starting in on him: "I told you to watch your language around the kids." "I know Ma, it slipped out, but Mike's at the door. I can't deal with this now." "Yes, you will deal with it." "Ma, not now." Teddy cut her off and opened the door. His brother stood there, square-shouldered and stubbly cheeked. Mike's jeans and work shirt were rumpled but not too dirty and Teddy could smell his brother's familiar body odor, earthy and musty.

"Come on in, little brother." Teddy threw his arm around Mike's shoulder and guided him into the living room, seating him in a chair with his back to the TV, which Teddy snapped off before crossing into the kitchen. "You're right on time. I was just about to make another pot of coffee."



The kids lined up to shake their uncle's hand, almost formally while Teddy measured out the water and coffee. He came back and sat across from Mike, trying to catch his eye.

"So how you doin'?" Teddy asked. Mike pulled on his stringy black mustache, gazed out the window where Max and Jimmie had gone out to play on the swing set. Paul crawled under Teddy's legs and then over to the television.

"Want me to turn on the TV, Uncle Mike, so you can talk to it?" Teddy stood up and gently pulled Paul's hand away from the dial.

On his last visit, Mike had lost control while watching TV, yelling at the screen during one of those idiotic reality video shows. It turned out Mike had stopped taking his medication because it made him feel queasy all the time. The day after the TV incident Mike apologized to Terri, Teddy's wife, and the kids, defusing another minor crisis.

"Come on you, outside." Teddy shuttled Paul out the back door. He went into the kitchen and poured Mike a cup of coffee, loading it with cream and three sugars. He held it up in front of Mike as if it were holy communion—Teddy never went to Mass anymore but still considered himself religious—then bent over and put it in his brother's hand.

"So how are you doin'?" Teddy asked again, emphasizing the "are" this time, peering into Mike's eyes, the left one that drooped, the right one that wandered occasionally. Mike looked down into his coffee mug, his hair hanging down and shielding the sides of his face.

"I'm doing." Mike glanced up, expressionless. "I'm doing okay, I guess." He swirled the mug slightly; Mike would wait until it cooled and then drink it down in one swig.

"You ought to call me before you come so I can take a day off work and we can go for a hike or something," Teddy said. He was thinking it would give him a chance to warn his wife.

"You're off today, aren't you?" Mike asked.

"Well, yeah, but I have to watch the kids."

Mike let this sink in. "Sure. I got you." He stared at his mug again.

Teddy would have taken the day off work, if only to keep an eye on him. Ever since last summer, when they were at Fred's place building the deck, and Mike had taken the post-hole diggers and smashed the cat's head, Teddy saw Mike in a different light. He had never thought his brother was capable of violence, but he knew that wasn't the case. Teddy hadn't told his wife about it. Keeping it from her had been hard. Since then, Mike had been to visit twice, and both times Teddy had trouble sleeping. For the first time, Teddy wasn't sure that Mike was harmless.

His brother had been a spacey kid, a little slow in school, but he got by all right. But just after their mother died ten years before, Mike went into a funk and had his first serious psychotic episode, and that day set in motion a chain of events that left him homeless and turned Teddy into a family man.

They were living together in the East Bay, working their own landscaping business. That day they were supposed to clear some brush behind a house for a wealthy client in Orinda, and then trim and shape a 12-foot Eugenia hedge. When he went to rouse Mike from bed, Teddy saw his brother cowering in the corner of his room, his arms wrapped around his legs and his chin resting on his knees.

"Mikey, let's go. I got the truck loaded. We've got a big day." His brother didn't look up, and Teddy noticed he was trembling. Mike's eyes were glazed

over and Teddy could tell he wasn't goofing around. He was frightened.

When Teddy asked Mike what was wrong, his brother pointed to the radio.

"To hell with the radio," he yelled, though he knew his anger was useless. "We gotta go."

"I can't. I can't go out today."

Teddy leaned in close to Mike, seeing the panic in his face, but instead of feeling sympathetic, he was angry.

"What's wrong with the radio?" Mike explained that the voices on the radio had told him about an electric field outside, and if he left the house he would get electrocuted. Teddy told Mike he'd handle the electric shear and let Mike use the hand trimmers, but he wouldn't budge.

That night he called their older sister Barbara, a nurse who'd stayed in Milwaukee after the family moved to the Bay Area. She told him to take Mike to see a psychiatrist. That shrink was the first in a series of doctors who diagnosed Mike—"paranoid schizophrenia," "manic depression," "obsessive compulsive disorder" and numerous drug treatments became familiar terms to Teddy, who'd almost flunked high school science. None of them worked for Mike. Finally, he decided to move up to the Chico area where Fred lived, noticing Mike's spirits improved when he was away from the crowds and traffic of the Bay Area.

The move had been good for Teddy as well. He had forced Mike to give up drugs after he got sick, so Teddy gave them up as well, except for the occasional joint. He had resented Mike for this for a long time, but in the end he realized in trying to save Mike, he had saved himself. And even though his brother, who now sat in front of him blowing on a mug of milky coffee in his living room, frustrated him, he felt

like he owed him. Teddy knew he could have wound up in worse shape than his brother.

“You hungry Mike?”

“Um, yeah, I guess so.” Mike seemed surprised, as if he’d forgotten about food.

“AB and J?” Teddy called out. “This almond butter’s fresh.”

Mike smiled and nodded. Fixing the sandwich relaxed Teddy, as if somehow the making of a sandwich lent the occasion an air of normalcy. As he spread the preserves, thick with chunks of strawberries, his mother’s voice ran through his head.

“See, it’s not such a big deal. Making a sandwich for your brother and giving him a place to stay is no skin off your chin.”

“I never said it was a big deal, did I?” he answered. “It’s ‘nose’ by the way.” His mother could never get sayings straight.

“Nose, schmose,” she shot back. “It’s nice to be important, but it’s more important to be nice, Mr. Big Shot.”

“Ma, who’s a big shot? I work at a nursery.”

“Just don’t forget where you came from, fatso,” and now he could feel her grabbing a fold of flesh near his ribcage, “and don’t forget who your family is.”

“How could I forget with you here to remind me every day?”

“What’d you say?” Teddy heard Mike’s voice in the background. “Did I say something? Musta been talking to myself.” Teddy brought the sandwich to Mike. As he watched him eat, Teddy realized how little he could offer of what his brother really needed. He could make sandwiches and coffee for Mike all day, do his laundry, loan him a few bucks, but Teddy couldn’t dredge up any more sympathy for his brother.

We all hear voices, Teddy reasoned. You just couldn't let it get to you. Mike's case was different, he knew, and he would let him stay with him because he had promised their mother he would look after his younger brother. These gestures satisfied that, even if they were hollow.

While Mike ate, Teddy fixed himself another fried egg and bacon sandwich, trying to ignore his wife's voice scolding him about the cholesterol. After they ate, the brothers went out into the back yard and Teddy showed Mike the vegetable patch he'd planted. Teddy walked Mike along the rear property line, a 100-foot stretch of squash, peppers, lettuce, beans, corn, carrots, garlic, herbs, and tomatoes, all planted Indian-style in oblong mounds instead of rows. The green shoots looked indistinguishable, but Teddy had memorized where everything was planted. He told Mike he had six different varieties each of pepper and lettuce alone.

"Did you know that at the turn of the century they planted about 100 different kinds of lettuce in the Central Valley?" Teddy asked. Mike, who was now kneeling and running his fingers through the soil, shook his head. "Now it's only about seven or eight. That's the problem these days: everything's too much the same."

"How's that?" Mike seemed interested.

"You know, people don't want things that are special anymore, things that are different." As soon as he said it, it occurred to Teddy that he could be talking about his brother, not lettuce. He remembered from his reading how some cultures valued the mentally ill as prophets and seers, and at one time he even thought of taking Mike to Alaska or Borneo or some place like that.

Mike turned back to the dirt. "I see what you mean,"



he said without looking up.

"Got five different kinds of tomatoes, too," Teddy said. "You remember the yellow ones, Mike, the kind we liked to eat right off the vine?" These were the only ones acceptable to Teddy's acid sensitive stomach.

Mike was still kneeling, burrowing his fingers into the rich black soil. "You mind if I do a little weeding for you?"

There weren't any weeds because Teddy had planted only two weeks before, but crawling through the garden and talking to the seedlings would keep Mike occupied for a while.

"Sure, go ahead. Careful of what I planted though."

Mike licked his lips, a habit he had picked up because one of the drugs he'd been on had constantly dried them out. It was a habit Teddy had also picked up and now he found himself imitating Mike again.

Teddy rubbed the saliva from his lips with his index finger, then crossed the yard to where the kids were playing. Max ran up to him. Teddy called to the boys, asking them if they wanted to take a walk down to the river. They came running.

Along the way, the kids stopped at certain boulders to put their hands in the mortar-shaped depressions; their father had told them these spots were carved by Indians, who used them to grind nuts to make flour. One day, Teddy had brought some dried corn and pestles so the three of them could make their own corn meal, which their mother had used that night to make cornbread. Further down the trail, they paused at their favorite spot, a stand of madrone trees, and the four of them lingered there, rubbing their thumbs against the smooth trunks. This ritual calmed Teddy, and as he pressed the nail of his index finger against

the smooth, gold-tinged wood, he made up another story of how the trees got their names.

"The Indians thought there was a mad Roman running around these woods with all his armor on. They tried to find him so they could ask him if he wanted to eat dinner with them, figuring he was hungry and lonely out here all alone and maybe a little mad, you know, as in crazy. But they never could catch up with him until one day they found him sleeping. They couldn't wake him up, and the next day when they came back, all they found was his armor, so they thought his spirit had flown away. They decided to plant his armor to see if it would grow, and it grew into these trees with the really hard wood. So they decided to call these trees Mad Roman. Get it? Madrone."

Max laughed, but Paul and Jimmie kept their fingers pressed against the trunks, and Teddy saw them imagining the suit of armor they had seen in the museum in San Francisco.

"That's not where the name came from, Daddy," Max shouted. "That's not the story you told last time."

From the angle of the sun Teddy figured he had about a half hour to sit by the river before they had to leave so they could beat his wife home from her job at the mill. A half-hour to sit and listen to the water, feel the sun on his skin, watch the kids explore the riverbanks.

"Daddy, I have to go potty," Max said, pulling on his arm. So much for that, Teddy thought, though it never bothered him when his kids inconvenienced him. Even when they were babies and cried some nights for hours, he never got annoyed because it seemed natural. Every time he did something for them,

even the simplest things like tying their shoelaces, it confirmed his role as a father and made him look deeper into himself to discover the kind of father he wanted to be. Teddy trailed the kids as they made their way back up the hill. When he reached the summit, he saw her truck in the driveway.

She stood over the kitchen sink scrubbing some beets. Teddy kissed her on the cheek and she nodded hello. He knew what her first question would be.

“So how long is he staying?”

“I didn’t ask.” “Probably the same as always—couple of days.” Teddy picked up one of the beets and started tossing it in the air. He threw it up high once, and then caught it on the way down behind his back with a flourish.

Terri chuckled. “Maybe you ought to take that dog and pony show on the road.”

“Maybe I should.” Teddy started juggling three beets at once. Then he went outside to see what Mike was up to and found him still groping about on his hands and knees, as if he were searching for something he lost in the black loam.

“You oughta take it easy there for a while,” Teddy called over to him. Then he noticed that Mike had pulled some of the seedling from one of his tomato mounds, the one where he’d planted the yellow tomatoes. Mike knew, Teddy fumed, he knew they are the only ones I can eat. He did it to irritate me. Teddy repeated to himself: I’m not going to get mad. I’m not going to get mad. This was his mantra for dealing with the kids, and Mike.

“Really, Mike, that’s enough. It’s time to get cleaned up for dinner.”

Mike rose and brushed the dirt from his knees. He surveyed the vegetable patch, and Teddy followed



his eyes as they went up and down the strip of dirt and slivers of green where Teddy had planted. It appeared the same as it had when Mike had started working that morning.

"Looks good, doesn't it?" Mike said, rubbing his hands against his jeans.

"Looks great, nice job." Teddy clapped him on the shoulder. Once in the house, he gave Mike a towel and set out a clean shirt and jeans, clothes he had around for his brother's visits. He put Mike's clothes in the washing machine. He'd performed these mundane chores for years and when he repeated them, they gave him a sense of hope. Teddy believed that if Mike's clothes were clean, his brother wouldn't become just another drifter with no family. But the tomato thing gnawed at him. The more he thought about it, the more it made him angry, and the more he wished Mike would leave because he was afraid he couldn't keep his temper in check.

It almost happened at dinner that night. Terri had made borscht with little scraps of stew meat in it, and, of course, Mike wouldn't eat it. Teddy grumbled audibly as he prepared a special meal for Mike—brown rice mixed with some honey and granola. Terri apologized to Mike, and hearing her apology made Teddy even angrier. He had to restrain himself after Max asked him why he didn't eat meat.

"Because it's like eating a corpse," Mike said.

"Mommy, what's a corpse?" she asked.

"Just finish your dinner, honey," Terri said, shooting Teddy a face that made him feel like he was being poked with a sharp pencil.

"What's a corpse, Daddy?"

"Really, honey, it's not something we want to discuss at the dinner table."

"Why won't you tell me?" Teddy could see she

was about to cry. He leaned forward. "A corpse is what you call something when it's dead."

"I don't want to eat dead stuff either."

"It's not dead. We cook it," Teddy said, surprised at his own convoluted logic.

"But is it dead before we cook it?" Max asked.

Teddy explained to her that the meat in the soup came from a cow, same as the milk. That cow was grown for food, just as Daddy grew plants in his garden for food.

"Just like we grow plants in the garden," he repeated, pointing outside to the back yard.

Max seemed unconvinced and refused to finish her soup. Teddy glared at Mike, but his brother had his face in the mound of rice and granola. But at least Mike didn't say anything aloud that night while the six of them sat staring at the television set. Teddy saw his brother's lips moving, not constantly, but at intervals as if he were having a conversation with the screen. Later, as they got ready for bed, Terri mentioned that she had noticed it as well.

"Has he been taking his medication?" she asked.

"I don't know. I didn't ask him." Teddy was lying on his back, and he set down his copy of *Organic Gardening* and looked up at his wife. "Did I tell you what he did?"

"No. What did he do?" She drew out the "no," the way she did sometimes with the kids.

Teddy sat up. "He tore out my damn yellow tomatoes. All day in the garden he's crawling around, 'weeding,' and the only thing he pulls up are the only tomatoes I can eat.

"Why don't you just relax?" she said, kissing him on the forehead. "He'll be gone in a few days and you can plant some more tomatoes. Don't worry about

it.”

But worry is exactly what Teddy did. Terri didn't know about the cat, and for that matter neither did his mother, or at least his mother never mentioned it, which struck Teddy as odd. If she were in heaven like he figured she was, she should know about Mike killing the cat, since she'd be able to see everything. But maybe people in heaven couldn't see everything.

He couldn't change how he was feeling about Mike. He'd read about the guy down in Grass Valley, somebody with similar symptoms and no history of violence who'd just snapped one day and hacked the whole family to death. Teddy hardly slept when Mike was there, getting up to check on the kids several times, every noise suggesting an image of Mike outside the door, garden shears in hand—like the guy in Grass Valley used—ready to stab them in their sleep.

Teddy knew his fears were unreasonable and reasonable at the same time. Sure, it could happen, but the chances were next to nothing. He was so jacked up when Mike visited, he thought as he rolled over and saw 3:43 illuminated in green on the clock radio, that there was no way his brother could even get up to use the bathroom without jolting Teddy awake. When he finally did fall asleep, he dreamed he was at a bowling alley going through the racks looking for a ball he could fit his fingers into. All the balls were cemented in their slots, and he pulled and kicked at them, but he couldn't loosen them. When he went to talk to the alley attendant, the guy had his back turned and was spraying disinfectant into a pair of shoes. When the guy turned, Teddy was surprised to see Mike's face.

Teddy was just as surprised to see Mike sitting in the front seat of the pickup when he went out to go to work the next morning.

“Can you drop me off at the highway? I forgot

about this job interview I have tomorrow outside of Portland.”

“Job interview? You didn’t mention any job interview.” Teddy knew Mike was lying; Mike hadn’t held a job in more than five years.

“Yeah, taking care of this old lady’s property, sort of like a caretaker thing.”

Teddy told him that was great. He tried to catch Mike’s eye, but his brother stared out the front window, as if they were driving already and it was Mike’s job to keep an eye on the road. He asked Mike if everything was okay.

Now Mike looked at him. “Everything’s fine. Sorry I got to rush off like this, but I just remembered.”

“Yeah, it’s too bad.” Teddy started the truck. “Too bad you have to leave so soon.” Although this is what Teddy had wanted, now that Mike was going he wasn’t satisfied. They had constructed a scenario both could live with, even if it wasn’t true. The lies, Teddy figured, were a way for them to be honest with each other because they each knew the other was lying, but those lies were told for the right reasons. Teddy didn’t want to tell Mike he wasn’t welcome, just as Mike didn’t want to say that he didn’t feel welcome.

When he pulled the car over, Teddy heard the voice of his mother, imploring him to reach out to his brother, but he ignored her. Instead, he slipped a twenty out of his wallet and into Mike’s hand. Mike protested, saying he’d get his disability check when he got back to Portland. Teddy put up his hand to silence him. The money was all he could offer Mike now, and though it didn’t make Teddy feel any better, he knew Mike could use the money for a meal or bus ticket.

They shook hands. Mike opened the door, hesitated as if he wanted to say something, but

climbed out without speaking. Before he slammed the door, Mike called out, "I'll see ya soon."

Teddy waved and said good-bye. He watched Mike amble toward the on-ramp of the highway, the strange shuffling walk he'd developed, his bedroll slung over his shoulder. His mother's voice started up in his head again and he sensed a lecture coming on: "Some brother you are—"

"Shut up, ma," Teddy said aloud, an uncharacteristic sharpness in his voice. "I don't have time to get into it now. I've got to go to work." He knew she'd be mad about this, but he figured he could patch things up with her later.

Putting the truck into drive, Teddy pulled slowly away from the curb. He saw Mike waiting at the bottom of the ramp, his thumb out though there were no cars passing by. He tapped the horn twice as he passed Mike, put his hand up to wave again. In the rear-view mirror, Teddy saw Mike raise his hand and form a fist, punching the air like a victorious athlete, he alone aware of the adversary he faced.

## **The Passing Of Grandpa Jack**

**MARY MARSHA CALLENDER CUPITT**

Grandpa Jack was finally dying. Aunts and uncles, cousins and half-cousins, were arriving daily to the back-bayou town of Thibodaux, Louisiana, to say their final respects, to visit with each other, and to have their say in the funeral plans and the distribution of what little property he and Gran'mamere had accumulated.

Aunt Michelle drove in from California. The number of boxes she packed into her Ford Fiesta made



it clear that she was planning to move back home, “now that there will be more room in the trailer.” She immediately took over the girls’ old bedroom, leaving her clothes strewn over the bedroom floor and her stockings hanging from the curtain rod in the shower. If anyone complained she suggested that there was space next door for them in the abandoned shack, and that usually hushed them up.

Aunt Marcia Marie and her boyfriend (the artist) drove in from their French Quarter apartment in New Orleans, took a room at the local Holiday Inn, while complaining that Aunt Michelle had left them no place to stay in the trailer, especially since Uncle Henry and his wife had taken over the boys’ old room. They thought Aunt Michelle should sleep on the sofa and give them the girls’ old room, though Gran’mamere said, “Marcia Marie and dat artist, dey not married, no. Dey should sleep in sep-ar-ate rooms if they are sleeping here.”

Uncle Anton, an aeronautical engineer with Lockheed in Atlanta, rented a plane and flew his entire family into Thibodaux’s tiny airport. His wife, Aunt Celeste, spent the next three days complaining about how backward Thibodaux was and how poor the accommodations were at the only bed-and-breakfast nearby, the A’La Maison des Sucre, in Houma, 20 miles away. She noted that the pool in the A’La Maison’s backyard was “only” 20 feet by 30 feet and she could not swim the laps prescribed by her personal trainer unless she was in an Olympic size pool. When Aunt Marcia Marie pointed out to her that the Holiday Inn in Thibodaux had an Olympic size pool, she huffed that she just could “not abide those boring, national chains.” In addition, she complained about the smell of unharvested, fermenting sugar canes in the sugar cane field near her open, bedroom window and

wondered why the owners of A'La Maison des Sucre had built their home in such a bad location.

My favorite aunt, Sister Mary Nicole, the nun, arrived from Chicago. She had traveled by train to New Orleans and then by bus to Thibodaux, but, as she constantly told us, would "never complain about the vows of poverty" she had taken. She had decided to become a nun when, at the age of 45, she found herself still unmarried. She brought the devout catholic point of view to the event, bringing along five extra strings of rosary beads, "just in case anyone forgot to bring theirs," and insisted that we all say our "Hail Mary's" over the comatose body of Grandpa before she would let us eat breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

My Mother, the oldest of Grandpa's children, and my Dad had moved back to Thibodaux four months earlier, soon after Grandpa had started losing his balance and falling. It had always been the intent of my parents to help Gran'mamere with Grandpa Jack as much as possible, and since my Dad had been able to retire at the age of 48 (he made his money managing a merger between two large pharmaceutical companies and getting  $\frac{1}{2}$  of 1% of the total value of the merger, not a small amount of money) they were able to respond to this crisis almost immediately.

They decided to build a 5000 square-foot house on the 15<sup>th</sup> hole of Thibodaux's only golf course, while maintaining their 6000 square-foot, oceanfront cottage on the New Jersey shore. They built the house with the intent of moving Grandpa Jack and Gran'mamere in with them, so that Grandpa's final days would be as comfortable as possible. Gran'mamere was delighted with the thought of no longer living in a trailer that rocked when anyone who weighed more than 150 pounds walked from the living room to the bedroom (and in Louisiana, that meant



just about every adult). Since Gran'mamere and Mom were best of friends, she was looking forward to the move.

According to the doctors, Grandpa Jack would soon be confined to a wheelchair, so Mom and Dad had the new home designed with every handicapped-accessible feature possible. The doorjambs were extra-wide, tiling was used in the flooring, tables were installed that were exactly the right height to roll a wheelchair up to and reading rooms and TV rooms were included in the design so that everyone could be involved in their favorite pastimes. The house was furnished with the very best furniture that the Great State of North Carolina had to offer. My parents flew into Hickory, NC, on a Friday afternoon, went straight to the world-famous Hickory Furniture Mart, and had the entire house decorated by late Saturday afternoon. No decorating detail was overlooked and no expense was considered excessive.

The only minor detail they forgot was to consult Grandpa Jack who, when given the opportunity to move into this palatial estate, refused to leave his trailer, stating, with a complete lack of logical thought, that "the trailer was good enough for me when I could walk and it will be fine when I'm in a wheelchair, too." They accepted this setback with equanimity, moved themselves into the new home, and figured out how to help Grandpa as he wheeled about in the trailer.

We had been expecting Grandpa to die "any day," since 1970, when he was injured in a life-changing, automobile accident. He had been heading home from a successful shrimping outing, his 1955 Chevrolet pickup truck loaded with ice-coolers filled with a huge catch of shrimp, got to going too fast and lost control. His truck collided with a farm-tractor that

was crossing the road while going from one sugarcane field to another. The truck flipped over, Grandpa was thrown from the truck, and extra-large, blue-gray shrimp were scattered all over the road. Before you could say "jambalaya," word had spread up and down the bayou that "shrimp, da size of baby alligators can be had for the pickin'." Men, women and children materialized from out of the morning fog to collect for themselves a fabulous, free meal. Almost before the ambulance arrived, the shrimp were completely picked off the road. As for Grandpa, his head hit the windshield and his neck was broken, severing the nerves to his hands. Charity Hospital did what it could for him but he was never able to use his hands again.

Before the wreck, my grandparents lived in a four-room shack down the bayou from Thibodaux, Louisiana. They were poor even then. My Mom had one pair of shoes for Sunday mass, but she attended public school barefoot. Her Sunday shoes needed to be kept new so that they could be passed, eventually, to her younger sisters. Grandpa provided for his family by trawling for shrimp and Gran'mamere raised up her six children by hard work and lots of sacrifice. She sewed the girls' clothes by hand and dressed the boys in coveralls handed-down from the neighbors. She and Grandpa provided most of the food the family consumed: she fed the family the fish she and my uncles caught off the bridge near their shack, the shrimp Grandpa caught which were too small to sell, and collard greens and okra that she grew in her small garden.

After the wreck, the Holy Ascension Catholic Church of Galiano ran a month of Bingo games to raise money to provide a nest egg for Gran'mamere and Grandpa. The same Cajuns what had gotten a free shrimp dinner from the wreck scene, now felt obligated to go and spend their money at the Bingo games

to “help dem po’ folks out. And “beside,” they said, “I might win dat mighty-fine Ford Mustang,” which was the grand prize for the month. My grandparents used the money to buy a brand-new, three-bedroom, indoor bath, air-conditioned trailer. They parked it next to their old shack. It was quite a sight—a brand-new, doublewide, white trailer still sitting on its tires, next to an old fishing shack that leaned away from the winds coming off the Gulf of Mexico. “Ma cher, we was so happy with dat new trailer with all dat cole air,” my grandma said. “And da chi’re— we was happy to have separate rooms for da boys and da girls.” Grandma wanted to keep the shack for storage and memories. “Dat’s where my chi’re were born. I won’t tear down the place where my chi’re was born!” she said. The Mennonites who operated a dairy farm not far up Highway 90 provided a month’s supply of milk for free. Course, Grandpa, who could no longer trawl for shrimp, had to suffer the humiliation of going on welfare and that’s how they lived their next 30 years.

My Mom had already left home and married my Dad several years before the wreck. She and Dad had met in high school. They spent many summer days on the beach of Grand Isle, an island near the mouth of the Mississippi river, enjoying swimming in the salty waters of the Gulf. After graduation from Thibodeaux High School, Mom sent herself through nursing school and Dad got his degree at LSU in finance. After they married, they moved to New Jersey where Dad got a position in the financial division of a large pharmaceutical company. At the time of the wreck, they offered to move back home to help care for Grandpa Jack, but Gran’mamere said to “leave us’n alone, we’ll be fine and we will figure this out ourselves. Youn three sisters, they still live here at

home and they will help with the care of your papa.” And so my parents agreed and left them to figure out how to make life work.

Grandpa was still able to walk after the wreck, although with a clumsy gait, and he had figured out how to feed himself. Nonetheless, he needed lots of help with basic tasks like getting dressed and shaving. Gran’mamere said that she was called by “Mary, the Sacred Mother of Jesus” to give “Christian love” to this man she had married 25 years before the accident even though he had spent all his time “drinkin beer on dat shrimp boat and flirting with dose loose floosies w’at danced at the local bars.” She got up at faithfully every morning at dawn to dress herself, prepare breakfast, and have it sitting on the table before Grandpa got up. When he awoke, he would call to her to “Come help me get up” with no “Please” or “T’ank you” to soften his demands. Patiently and with good humor, she would stop what she was doing and return to the bedroom to help him get to a sitting position and then to a stand so that he could begin his day. His first steps were always slow and cautious.

Gran’mamere coped with this difficult life by her devotion to the Catholic Church. She attended morning mass at Our Lady of Prompt Succor Catholic Church in Golden Meadow on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings, Bingo at Holy Ascension Catholic Church on Wednesday night (always eager to help others as she had been helped, herself), and confession on Saturday morning at the Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church. On Sunday morning she usually attended Sunday morning mass in Thibodaux, at Our Lady of the Rosary. She tried to get Grandpa to go with her, but most morninga he preferred to stay at home and watch Wheel of Fortune with Vanna White or work on his jigsaw puzzles.

But now, Grandpa Jack was dying. The doctors said that he would probably live only a few more days. He had fallen into a coma and received nourishment through an intravenous tube. Mom assured the doctor that, since her profession was nursing, she could continue to provide care for him at the home. And so it was agreed that he would remain in the trailer and the family would provide the care that he needed in that setting.

Several funeral homes existed in the towns around Thibodaux and competition was stiff for the business of burying the dead. The largest, Falgout's Funeral Home and Crematorium, advertised on billboards and in the local newspaper. Their biggest advertising gimmick was to give a 20% discount on the purchase price of a casket and burial plot to anyone who purchased these items before they had died. The first to see the advertisement was Aunt Marcia Marie, who, always thrilled by a bargain, cut the advertisement out and showed it to the rest of the family. Aunt Michelle agreed that the casket and the burial plot should be purchased as soon as possible because "he is going to die anyway and we might as well pay less and leave the extra for repairing the bathroom and installing some extra rods." Uncle Anton thought it would be disrespectful to purchase the casket and burial plot on discount since his Daddy deserved "only the best in his final resting place." Aunt Sister Mary Nicole was concerned whether this funeral home was sanctioned by the local Catholic Church or not and so wanted to also consider Chauvin Funeral Home since Chauvin was "a good Catholic name." And so the debates went for several days, when Dad said, "I've got it! We should purchase them both now, before he dies. That is what Jack would want—nothing he liked more than a good bargain." And so it was decided to go down to



Falgout's Funeral Home and Crematorium and purchase the casket and burial plot at the discounted price.

We all went together, except Aunt Celeste who said she could not bear to think about such things. She agreed to sit with the small children "if they would play outside" and with Grandpa, though she said that she wouldn't "know what to do if he, you know, kicked off, while y'all are gone." She wouldn't be bored, she said. She would do her nails while she waited.

Ten of us went to the funeral home to help make the selections, oversee the purchases, and, most importantly, get out of the trailer. But, oh my, the decisions that had to be made. Who knew? "Was the Soon-to-be Dearly-Departed needing a cremation urn and a storage space or a casket and a burial plot?" "A casket." They had to choose between wooden caskets, aluminum caskets, fiberglass, stainless steel, burnished bronze, solid wood or fabricated, or even cardboard. If wood was selected, they had to choose from cherry, walnut, poplar, or oak, hand carved or pressed designs, orthodox or non-orthodox, and then select a finish. If they chose stainless steel, then the choices included 20-gauge, 18-gauge, or 16-gauge steel. Bronze was burnished or unburnished. Then there were style choices that included art deco, Country French, French Normandy, and Old English. Or you could buy a "look." The looks went by names such as "The Cathedral," "Custom Country," "The Elite," "the Moonlight Valley," or "The Going Home," to fit the image the family had for the afterlife of their loved one. Did they want a full-couch or a half-couch? "Half-couch is very popular this year," said the salesperson (meaning, of course, that it cost more than the full). And then, of course, there was the variation in price: cardboard

boxes were as little as \$600 and solid cherry could run the cost up to \$6,000.

A fabric for the interior of the casket had to be selected: satin, silk (which was the most expensive), velvet, linen, lace, cotton, or crepe (which was the least expensive). And then they had to choose the color of the fabric. No basic colors like red or green or yellow were available. The colors were all two-word descriptions like sea-green, or artic-blue, or lemon-yellow. According to the salesman, blues, white and beiges were popular but one could also select quilting designs if one wanted a CustomCountryCreation.

And then there were the decisions to be made about the burial plot. Did they want an above-ground plot or below-ground? In Louisiana, a below-ground plot was not recommended due to the problems of keeping the hole free of seeping water. If they wanted an above-ground plot, what materials did they want to use to construct it--pre-cast concrete or marble or bricks? Did they want to buy one plot or two? The extra plot would be for Gran'mamere so she would be guaranteed a space next to Grandpa Jack when she died. And did they want to pay extra for a plot near a stand of Tupelo sweet gum trees toward the center of the cemetery or would they be happy with plots along the roadside next to the drainage ditch? A plus here was that there were some cypress trees growing at the edge of the ditch which could provide some beauty to the resting place.

The family was over-whelmed. Aunt Sister Mary Nicole wanted "The Cathedral" since "the church has been such a great influence in our lives and is SO important to our mama." Aunt Michelle wanted the least expensive, "But not cardboard," since she was down to her last \$500 and wanted as much money as possible left over, without being "disrespectful to



My Papa.” Mom and Dad would have been happy to pay the whole thing but did not dare to mention it since, more than once, they had been accused of “flaunting” their money. Uncle Anton wanted to buy the package deal, “The Elite,” since he knew that Aunt Celeste would lecture him about the importance of image when they got back to the trailer. And Aunt Marcia Maria’s boyfriend wanted us to select the art deco design because it was “so, way cool.”

After hours of haggling, the choices were made. “The Going Home” package was selected with a burial plot near a cypress tree covered with Spanish moss because Aunt Marcia Marie remembered that, “he delights in sitting under the cypress trees near the trailer.” Velveteen fabric was selected when Uncle Henry mentioned, “he loved the feel of Mama’s blue velvet bonnet,” and Royale Red was selected as the color to surround him when I remembered that red was Grandpa Jack’s favorite color. All but the boyfriend of Aunt Marcia Marie were satisfied with the choices. He felt that the color red was much too harsh for the occasion and would have preferred that they had selected a more gentle color such as Haystack-Apricot, and he disliked the design we selected calling it “trite and hackneyed, lacking an artist’s touch.” But he understood that he was not a family member and so deferred to the others.

Back at the trailer, it was clear that we had bought the casket and burial plot, none-to-soon. Grandpa’s breathing was very slow, and stopped altogether for minutes at a time. Aunt Sister Mary Nicole passed out the rosary beads and we sat in the living room saying our “Hail Mary’s” while Grandpa breathed his last breaths. Mom stayed in the bedroom with Grandpa through the night and the next morning, the rest preferring not to be in the room because, as

Aunt Michelle said, "We are so unsure of what to do and besides, you're the nurse." When his breathing became both slow and labored everyone squeezed into the bedroom to say their last goodbyes. And then he was gone.

Then the doorbell rang. Aunt Michelle answered the door and found, standing on the porch, Mr. Falgout, the owner of the funeral home, smiling broadly, and apologizing that there was one last form to sign. "It would be so nice if it was signed by the future resident of the burial plot," he said, smiling so broadly that she could see most of his teeth. And then he added, "I always like to meet my future clients in person." Aunt Michelle screamed and slammed the door shut. In a huge panic, she ran to Grandpa's bedroom and explained the problem. My Uncle Henry, always the moralist, argued that we should explain that Grandpa had just died. Aunt Michelle definitely opposed that idea, pointing out that the discount might have to be returned and that every bit of money saved was needed for "Mama to buy a new funeral outfit," (not to mention that she would need a few things to make her new room more comfortable) and Aunt Sister Mary Nicole indicated that she hoped some of the saved money could go the Catholic Charities and so did not want to tell him, either. Dad wanted to offer to pay the discount himself but knew that it was socially risky to suggest it. Finally, we decided to hide the body in the closet while Uncle Henry, the older of the brothers, threw on some pajamas, turned off most of the lights in the bedroom, and hoped into the bed. He put on a sorrowful look, hoped that Mr. Falgout would not remember meeting him yesterday, and then signaled to let Mr. Falgout in.

Aunt Sister Mary Nicole met Mr. Falgout at the door to the bedroom, apologized for the dim light-

ing, indicated that he should make his visit brief, and that they should whisper since “loud noises will bother the invalid.” Mr. Falgout approached the bed, nodded to Gran’mamere who was standing at the head of the bed looking horrified, and put out his hand to shake the hand of Grandpa. Uncle Henry, completing forgetting that Grandpa had not used his hands in 25 years, returned the handshake. Aunt Sister Mary Nicole indicated that “the invalid” was too weak to sign the form without help and so she guided Uncle Henry’s hand while he slowly formed the letters in Grandpa Jack’s name. Uncle Henry then pretended to be exhausted by the effort, breathed deeply, closed his eyes, and pretended to go to sleep. Aunt Michelle quickly escorted Mr. Falgout from the room and was showing him to the front door when she saw the doctor walking up the driveway to sign the death certificate. Quickly, she pulled Mr. Falgout back into the living room and asked that he should leave by the back door “because, uh, because it is...yea... because it is considered good luck for guests to leave by the back door when a family member is dying.” Now, that was not a good luck charm with which Mr. Falgout was familiar but he knew that families acted oddly in times of stress so he said that he was happy to exit by the back door. No sooner was he through the back door then the doorbell rang again. The doctor had arrived.

Now we needed to get the body back in the bed before the doctor went to the bedroom. While the women engaged the doctor in the front room with inappropriate jokes that they had read on the internet, we men quickly pulled the body from the closet where he was stashed and laid him back on the bed. The body was beginning to get stiff by now and it was difficult to straighten out the legs and arms. I was called upon to lay across the legs to make them lie flat, while Un-

cle Anton pulled on the arms to straighten them. We pulled the sheet over Grandpa's head and gently laid the blanket over his legs. Uncle Henry got back into his street clothes and we went out to greet the doctor.

After that, things went pretty smoothly. Falgout's Funeral Home was called and they promptly collected the body. Mr. Falgout did not mention the fact that the body that he prepared for burial had two hands that had clearly not been functional for years nor did he indicate any recognition of Uncle Henry when he conveyed his regrets to him at the funeral. We all agreed that Grandpa looked wonderful next to the red velvet fabric and knew that he would be very comfortable in the "Going Home" package. We did, however, wonder why Grandpa's hair was combed differently—sort of the way that Uncle Henry combs his hair, but we said nothing about it to Mr. Falgout. We knew that Grandpa was happy: a good bargain had been found.

# Crane's Use of Irony in *Maggie*

JARED PACE

Stephen Crane's novel Maggie: A Girl of the Streets tells of a young girl who initially blossoms in the urban slums, but is eventually driven to prostitution by her environment. Although Crane doesn't specifically moralize or discuss social injustices in Maggie, he still makes a case concerning socioeconomic determinism. Maggie and Jimmie grow up in the bowery, raised by alcoholic parents who consistently trash their house during extraordinarily violent bouts. Their environment is devoid of morality, and it twists their perceptions into contradictory beliefs. Crane uses irony to illustrate the dissimilarities between reality and perception and to guide the reader to obvious conclusions concerning socioeconomic conditions.

Crane contrasts the reality and perception of Jimmie's fight on top of the gravel heap to show that, due to the "survival of the fittest" mentality of the slums, he needlessly endures the attack because he values strength. The rock fight in the beginning of the book is described as a medieval conflict where Jimmie defends Rum Alley's honor. The attacking children have the "grin of true assassins" (Crane 1), Jimmie is described as "the little champion" (1), blows are thrown with "catapultian power" (3), and words like "valor" and "barbaric" define the children and the conflict. There exists, however, an overwhelming incongruity between the fight's description and what truly occurs. Not only do the other Rum Alley children desert Jimmie during the confrontation, but the curious woman, some laborers, and an engineer watch as the children assail one another as well. Through this com-



parison, as one author writes, "Crane suggests that the idea of honor is inappropriate to the reality" (Pizer 187). The irony, of course, is that a boy on a pile of rocks providing entertainment for some onlookers is far from being a warrior struggling in a courageous plight for honor. Furthermore, there exists little honor in the children's retreat or the onlookers' indifference. Why, then, does Jimmie continue fighting? It becomes much more apparent later, when Jimmie admires the fire engine because it "[breaks] up the most intricate muddle of heavy vehicles at which the police had been storming for half an hour" (Crane 19), that he values strength. His society doesn't respond to the police, a traditionally powerful, authoritative symbol, but to the brute force of a fire engine. Jimmie wants to be the fire engine that obliterates the children of Devil's Row, even if it means being pummeled by stones. His environment teaches him that through strength, respect is earned and results are achieved. Crane writes that after the fight, "Valor grew strong again, and the little boys began to brag with great spirit" (3). In the slums, where genuine values are virtually nonexistent, meaning is found in the ability to endure conflict. Through contrasts surrounding descriptions of the fight, Crane leads readers to conclude that Jimmie, due to his socioeconomic environment, attaches unfounded meaning to the endurance of hardships.

Maggie's ignorance of the discrepancy between the immoral audience at the melodrama and their regard for morality foreshadows her downfall and leads readers to believe that, in the slums, innocence is a handicap. Crane tells of how actors who made the "most subtle distinctions between right and wrong" (36) are denounced because the audience assumes they are wicked. This image is laughable, as the



audience, or society, consists of the same people who were indifferent to Jimmie's fight, people like Maggie's violent parents, and, as we learn at the end, the men walking the streets looking for prostitutes and the priest who did not know that "there was a soul before him that needed saving" (Crane 71). As Walcott writes in an essay, "these people are victimized by their ideas of moral propriety which are so utterly inapplicable to their lives that they constitute a social insanity" (166). Their hypocrisy is so profound as to make one question whether they're ignorant or crazy. Nevertheless, Maggie does not recognize this discrepancy and, as Crane writes, wonders "if the culture and refinement she had seen imitated. . . could be acquired by a girl who lived in a tenement house and worked in a shirt factory" (36). Completely taken aback by the plays, Maggie begins to believe she can ascend the social scale. Ironically, this misconception is brought on by people completely lacking social status. She also believes that Pete is a man of elegance who possesses "lordly characteristics" (52), that the audience values virtue, and that she has a future. Since her beliefs are derived from misperceptions, her conclusions can easily be dismissed. Her innocence arguably lies in her ignorance and proves to be disastrous. Maggie's misperceptions foreshadow her destruction, and with this, Crane asserts that innocence is crushed in deprived conditions.

Crane initially portrays Maggie as untouched by her environment to assert that negative surroundings will eventually rob individuals of their worth. Early in the novel, Crane writes that Maggie "blossomed in a mud puddle" (20) and that "none of the dirt of Rum Alley seemed to be in her veins" (20). Initially, the perception concerning the images of her untouched beauty possibly foreshadows an escape

from the slums. This would be, however, unrealistic “since it is difficult to accept that the slums would have no effect on her character” (Pizer 191). Nevertheless, Maggie sees the other women deprived of youth by the collar-and-cuff establishment and begins to “see the bloom upon her cheeks as something of value” (Crane 33). It later becomes evident, after Maggie is forced away by her family and Pete tells her “Oh, go t’ hell!” (71), that she is in conflict with her environment, and beauty is her sole possession. As one author writes, Crane often has characters “at odds with hostile environments and struggling with – or because of – their perceptions of those environments” (Magill 1217). Maggie perceives, because of her environment, her beauty as an asset, when it is actually a blessing and a curse. The blessing being that she possesses it, the curse being that, after she’s ostracized by both Pete and her family, beauty gives her value as a prostitute. After having been a prostitute for some months, she is referred to as “old girl” (Crane 73) and “old lady” (74). This denotes a loss of beauty, as she is elderly looking. Ironically, her environment twists her attractiveness into the potential to be a prostitute, which itself robs her of it. Crane allows Maggie’s environment to grant and revoke her beauty to show that, in surroundings such as Maggie’s, one is never beyond contamination.

In having Mrs. Johnson forgive her daughter, Crane starkly contrasts her outlook and the truth of the situation and forces readers to conclude that children with mothers like Maggie’s have predetermined lives. Mrs. Johnson says, “I bringed ‘er up deh way a daughter oughta be bringed up, an’ dis is how she served me! She went the deh devil deh first chance she got!” (57). Her perception of herself as a nurturing mother defies all logic; on the same page, she ex-

claims, "She kin cry 'er two eyes out on deh stones of deh street before I'll dirty d' place wid her" (57). The question begs: if she's such a nurturing mother, why is she unwilling to help her daughter? Mrs. Johnson is angry because of Maggie and Pete's relationship. As stated in a criticism of Maggie, "it is really the mother who is ultimately responsible for Maggie's seduction by Pete" (Brennan 176). Mrs. Johnson forces Maggie into Pete's arms and refuses to help her after he tells her to "go t' hell" (Crane 71), and therefore, is the one who requires forgiveness. The misperception here is Mrs. Johnson's, and as Colvert states, "the brutal Mrs. Johnson believes that she is the most self-sacrificing of mothers" (147). After being pushed away by Pete and her family, Maggie's options, as stated by Jimmie, are to "go on d' toif er go t' work!" (Crane 20). Her disgust for the collar-and-cuff establishment rule out work, and her environment provides only one other option: prostitution. Mrs. Johnson, who lacks any value as a mother whatsoever, is the epitome of hypocrisy for forcing her daughter into the streets, causing her death, lamenting her loss, and then forgiving her. One shudders at the thought of cities filled with mothers like Mrs. Johnson. This is exactly the idea that Crane entertains in a microcosmic example of slum life. Through the irony of Mrs. Johnson forgiving her daughter, Crane reveals the path available to slum children and leads readers to believe that Maggie's life, like the lives of many others, has a predetermined path to destruction.

Without specifically moralizing, Crane uses irony as a tool to juxtapose truth and perception and to engage readers in his viewpoint of socioeconomic determinism. Each piece of irony, from Jimmie's noble battle to Mrs. Johnson's forgiving Maggie, serves to reveal a society devoid of moral values and one whose

inhabitants' beliefs are contradictory to their social well-being. As Crane illustrates, such beliefs are inescapable in economically deprived populations such as the bowery, and they destroy the weak and twist the perceptions of those able to survive. This compels the reader to conclude that environment is an insurmountable force that determines destiny.

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# Eros Vs. Thanatos

BRENT WINTER

Ernest Hemingway's novel *For Whom The Bell Tolls* is often called a war novel, but it would be more accurate to call it a novel about conflicts—the many conflicts that take place within a war. The most fundamental conflict of any war is the struggle between life and death. This struggle is mirrored in the relationship between Robert Jordan and Maria. Jordan is depicted as the coldly rational soldier whose war-time work always comes first, but Maria is portrayed as a personification of the natural abundance of the living world. Jordan operates comfortably and capably in a world of death and killing, while Maria is a healer, a provider of succor and rejuvenation. Despite these differences, Jordan and Maria are drawn irresistibly to each other. Their wartime love affair shows how sex, love, and life are the counterparts (rather than the opposites) of killing, war, and death. The relationship between Jordan and Maria demonstrates how the death-force of Thanatos, as represented by Jordan, is locked in constant oppositional tension with the life-force of Eros, represented by Maria.

Jordan's strong affinity for soldiering makes him well-suited to play the part of Thanatos. In his conversation with General Golz, Jordan is revealed to be a highly competent demolition expert who likes being a guerilla soldier "very much" (7). For instance, when Jordan begins sketching the bridge he is to demolish, he does so "quickly and happily; glad at last to have the problem under his hand; glad at last actually to be engaged upon it" (35). When contemplating a beautiful snowstorm that has delayed his demolition



plans, Jordan thinks, "In a snowstorm it always seemed, for a time, as though there were no enemies. . . . It was ruining everything, but you might as well enjoy it" (182). A person who regards a lack of enemies as a ruination must like warfare in some way. Jordan does not particularly care for killing, but neither does he shrink from it when necessary in wartime. Jordan has this to say about killing: "You must do it as a necessity but you must not believe in it" (304). Despite his reservations, Jordan has freely chosen to operate on behalf of death, placing him decisively in the camp of Thanatos.

Jordan allows his thanatic commitments as a soldier to supersede the demands of human relationships, suggesting that he believes love and death are incompatible. Carlos Baker notes that Jordan "cannot often expand warmly; as soldier he must contract coldly within himself" (112). When General Golz asks Jordan whether he has many girls on the other side of the lines, Jordan replies, "No, there is no time for girls. . . . I have enough to think about without girls" (7). He restates this sentiment often, saying he has no time for women or they are not important to him. The dichotomy Jordan perceives between love and war or death turns into an area of conflict for him when he becomes romantically involved with Maria. When Maria asks Jordan if she can be his woman, he replies, "I cannot have a woman doing what I do" (73). Jordan thinks of Maria as a distraction from his important work, even though he is drawn to her and wants to experience greater intimacy with her. Other examples of this dichotomy between love and death occur immediately after Jordan shoots the cavalryman outside the cave. Jordan thinks to himself that he "could feel Maria against his knees, dressing herself under the robe. She had no place in his life



now" (267). Soon afterward, Maria says to Jordan, "'Say that you love me.' 'No. Not now.' 'Not love me now?' '*Dejamos*. Get thee back. One does not do that and love all at the same moment'" (269-70). Jordan steadfastly maintains a sharp division between his love for Maria and his duty as a soldier.

While Jordan is the dealer of death, Maria is described in terms of living phenomena of the natural world to show that she is a personification of life itself. When Jordan first sees Maria, this is how she looks to him: "Her hair was the golden brown of a grain field that has been burned dark in the sun but it was cut short all over her head so that it was but little longer than the fur on a beaver pelt" (22). Maria's hair is repeatedly described as a grain field or an animal pelt. When Jordan sees Maria walk, he thinks, "She moved awkwardly as a colt moves, but with that same grace as of a young animal" (25). These descriptions show that Jordan sees Maria as a vibrant, beautifully alive creature. Her identification with life forces becomes more apparent as the book progresses. In one passage, Pilar ruthlessly interrogates Maria about the sex she and Robert have just had. Robert thinks, "But it wasn't evil. It was only [Pilar] wanting to keep her hold on life. To keep it through Maria" (176). Pilar sees Maria as a conduit for life energy and attempts to use her as such. Later, when Pablo's group has gathered behind his back to discuss whether or not to kill him, Maria is the only person to speak out against killing him. She, as life's agent, is the sole voice pleading the case of life. When Jordan thinks about the future he and Maria will never have together, "he glorifies eros in an image of union, an image corresponding to the mythic ideal of woman as life" (Lewis 125). Maria brings potent life energy into Robert's life in the form of sexual love.

Just as it is typically women who are seen as bringers of life and men as bringers of death in European cultures, so is Maria's erotic potential often channeled in terms of traditional gender roles. For one thing, her name identifies her with Christendom's nurturing woman *par excellence*, as exemplified by Anselmo's fervent prayer: "Most kind, most sweet, most clement Virgin" (327). Maria embodies this nurturing role in a traditionally gendered way by helping Pilar cook the food and serving it to the men. She expresses the desire to take care of Robert as a wife should, and she demonstrates this by fetching his socks and his liquor for him one night when he comes into the cave from a snowstorm. Maria's care for Jordan on this occasion is so solicitous that Pilar notes mockingly, "Must you care for him as a suckling child?" (203). Maria also takes it upon herself to meet the emotional needs of the men in her band, as when she comforts Joaquin and Primitivo when they are upset by kissing them on the cheek. Yet her rejuvenating activities are limited by virtue of her status as a woman in a sexist society. There are many scenes in the book where Robert is engaged in the significant action and Maria is behind him, looking over his shoulder at what he is doing. One example of this occurs in the cave when Robert and Pablo are sitting at the table together, having a contentious conversation that is building into a confrontation. At this moment, "Maria was standing behind [Jordan] and Robert Jordan saw Pablo watching her . . ." (211). Sometimes Robert tells Maria to leave the vicinity altogether, especially when war plans are to be discussed. For instance, when Robert and Pilar wish to discuss plans for blowing the bridge with El Sordo, Robert gets rid of Maria in this manner: "'Run along a minute, will you?' he said to Maria without looking at her" (151).

Robert allows Maria to provide life-giving nurturance to him in ways that do not compromise the primacy of his thanatic mission.

The solution Maria proposes to this conflict between life and death is a complete union between herself and Robert. Maria advocates for this union when she says to Jordan, "I want to go to hold the legs of the gun and while it speaks love thee all in the same moment" (270). Robert and Maria move further in this direction on their last night together when she is too sore to make love and she offers to perform some other sexual service for him. He refuses, thinking: "Who was it cast his seed upon the ground in the Bible? Onan. How did Onan turn out? he thought. I don't remember ever hearing any more about Onan" (342). Rudat notes that "Jordan had taken an important step toward complete integration when he realized that he could reach complete self-realization only if he gave his seed to Maria . . . instead of wasting it in an act of onanistic narcissism" (157). Jordan finally realizes the value of a complete union between himself and Maria, between love and death, when he sees Maria after blowing the bridge. He thinks:

He had never thought that you could know that there was a woman if there was battle; nor that any part of you could know it, or respond to it; nor that if there was a woman that she should have breasts small, round and tight against you through a shirt; nor that they, the breasts, could know about the two of them in battle. But it was true and he thought, good. That's good. (456)

Jordan learns that "since life ends with death—since death, in other words, is a constituent part of life—it is

unthinkable to accept life without simultaneously recognizing death as life. Life includes death" (Bjorneboe). Jordan's acceptance of this holistic unity allows him to become "completely integrated" when he makes his last stand at the end of the novel (471). Jordan's death paradoxically "announces his life" (Busch). Death and life have merged into the ultimate unity, as Maria has insisted they should.

The relationship between Robert Jordan and Maria clearly demonstrates the conflict between love and death and how these two polar forces can function in an interpenetrated manner within a romantic relationship. Jordan takes the side of death as a volunteer combat soldier. He always puts his wartime work before the comforts of love and companionship because he believes love and death are incompatible. Opposed to this death-force is Maria, who is the avatar of the life forces of the universe. Maria plays her part as the erotic bringer of life within the roles and expectations reserved for her gender. Maria resolves the conflict between the life she brings and the death Jordan espouses by effecting a union between herself and Robert. Eros summons Thanatos to merge with her, and he eventually complies.

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# *Reflections*

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